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THE FLEET SCOURGE

OR,

THE SEA WINGS OF SALEM.

A Romance of Whalers and Sea Rovers.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "THE SCOUTS OF THE SEA," "SAIL-
OR OF FORTUNE," "MAGIC SHIP," "MERLE,
THE MUTINEER," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT MURDER.

A CRY for help rung out loud, clear and ap-
pealing, and in the voice of a man.

It came from an old stone house on a hill,
near a New England seaport village, and where
dwelt old "Peter Rutledge, the Miser," as he
was called, and his young and beautiful wife.

Peter Rutledge was known to be rich; he own-
ed large interests in ships that sailed to foreign
lands, and his property in town was worth many
thousands.

But his old house was a rookery, and only one
wing of it was inhabited, the rest of the large
building being closed up, and not even fur-
nished.

WITH WILD YELLS, THE YOUNG AMERICAN SAILOR'S ARAB MASTER AND HIS HORSE-
MEN CAME DASHING TOWARD HIM AT FULL SPEED.

The grounds were in a weed-grown condition, the fences and walls tumbling down, and upon all there rested an air of neglect and desolation.

And yet to this house, where he dwelt with two old servants—a man and his wife—Peter Rutledge had brought a young and lovely girl-wife, for she was scarcely eighteen, while he had passed two score and ten.

People wondered, and many were the stories that went about regarding the miser and the one who had sold herself to him for his gold; but she was seldom seen away from the grounds, and her husband was one who was not a man to let others meddle with his affairs.

No one had ever gone near Peter Rutledge, except on business, and so no one called upon his wife, and nothing was known regarding her, other than that he brought her from the city of Boston, where he was wont to go four times each year.

Five years had Peter Rutledge been married to his young wife, at the time this story opens, and two children had been born to them, a son and daughter; but the miser hated to have his quiet disturbed, and so the little ones, after a year at home, each had been sent away, it was supposed, to their mother's relatives in Boston.

What the young wife and mother suffered no one knew; but still no one had believed that she had a wicked heart.

And yet, when the cry for help rung out from the stone mansion that stormy winter night, two wayfarers had heard it, and rushed into the grounds and up the rickety front steps.

The oaken door was locked and barred, but there was heard within a faint cry and the two men threw themselves against it, and, after a second effort it went in, and they rushed into the room upon the right of the large hall.

It was the miser's own room, and there before the blazing fire he lay, groaning and struggling against death.

And by him knelt his wife, wringing her hands, her hair hanging in waves over her shoulders, and her face livid and stern.

Her hands were stained with the life-blood of her husband, and, as she arose when the men entered, she looked the picture of an avenging Nemesis.

The men were the village constable and his assistant, returning home after taking a prisoner to the jail, and glancing at each other, as they beheld the tragic picture, one of them sprang to the side of the dying man and said:

"Speak, Mr. Rutledge, who has done this? Who is your murderer, for you are a dying man?"

Faintly came the reply of the old miser:

"Ask her who my murderer is!"

Then sharply came the response, as the men turned their eyes upon the beautiful woman:

"If I hang for it I will not tell!"

They turned again to the miser.

His eyes glared at them wildly; he tried to speak, and half raised himself from the floor; but he fell back, dead; his lips were forever sealed.

"Madam, I am an officer, and it is my duty to arrest you," said the constable.

"Arrest me?" she cried, starting back.

"Yes, as the person who has done this deed. You are my prisoner, and must go with me to jail."

She groaned, buried her face in her hands and swayed to and fro, as though about to fall.

But as the constable grasped her arm, she sprang back and cried sternly:

"Do not touch me! I am ready to go with you."

CHAPTER II.

THE MURDERERS.

THE little seaport town of G— was shaken to its very center by the startling news that flew about with the morning following the murder.

"Miser Pete Rutledge had been slain by his young and beautiful wife," was going from lip to lip.

To the jail the accused woman had been taken and the city attorney of Peter Rutledge had come down and taken possession of his property.

It was found to be very large, and everything, even to his cash on hand, mentioned in his will, had been left to his "devoted and dearly-loved wife, Lola," with the exception of a legacy of one thousand dollars to the old servants who had been with him for twenty years.

His children were not mentioned, other than to say that they were left to their mother's keeping.

Of course, to free herself from her miser husband, and become a rich young widow, rumor said was the reason of Mrs. Rutledge's dark deed.

But, why had she killed him as she had done, with a dirk, when she knew that it must be found out, was what puzzled many.

The day of trial came round, and the courthouse was crowded to suffocation.

White-faced, sad-eyed, but calm, the beautiful prisoner took her seat, unmindful of the eyes bent upon her.

The city attorney was to defend her, and to

the accusation she replied in a voice that was heard by all:

"Not guilty."

There were no witnesses to summon, other than the two officers who had heard the miser's wild cries for help and dashed into the old mansion to the rescue.

They told of the last words of the miser, and as the two old servants lived in a cottage on the grounds, they knew nothing other than that the miser had always seemed to be devoted to his wife, while she was cold in her manner toward him.

Her story was told in a distinct voice, and to the effect that she had been in her own room, heard her husband's cry for help, and, dashing in, had found him dying, while a man had sprung out of the door into the hall and thus escaped ere the officers entered.

But against this were Peter Rutledge's dying words:

"Ask her who my murderer is!"

The jury did not leave the box, but at once brought in the verdict:

"Guilty."

There was a suppressed murmur in court at the verdict, and all eyes turned upon the prisoner.

She did not flinch, and, to the horror of all, smiled.

But it was a smile that none could fathom.

Then she arose and received her sentence unmoved, and went from the court back to the "cell of the condemned," in the jail, to there remain until she was to be led forth to die on the gallows.

She sent for her attorney, thanked him for his services in her behalf, paid him liberally and made her will, but, what that will was no one knew, for the lawyer was sworn to secrecy.

Then there came to jail to see her a woman, dressed in deepest black, and with her face so heavily veiled no one knew who she was, or whether young or old.

She spent two hours alone with the condemned widow, and then departed, taking the stage out of town soon after she left the jail.

There was one who sought to know more than others, and he determined to track her to her home.

She asked him if he was going to Boston, and he answered that he was, believing it to be her destination.

"Then I leave the stage here at the cross-roads, where we meet the other coaches, and if you follow me I shall kill you as I would a mad dog," came the low, earnest response.

The man trembled with fright, and was only too glad to give up his work as an amateur detective, to solve a woman's secret. So the veiled visitor to the cell of the condemned murderess remained still unknown.

The day of execution came, and having refused to see the clergyman who had called to administer to her in her last hours, the condemned widow, with stern, set face, but bright, fearless eyes, went forth to her awful doom.

Hardened woman though they called her, there was in her sad, beautiful face something which touched the hearts of many, and there were others who, long after, were heard to say:

"She was innocent."

Unflinching to the last, and with a sad smile upon her lips, she met her doom, and the murder of Peter Rutledge the Miser was avenged.

Some one claimed the body; some said it was the attorney, others that it was the veiled unknown, who had visited the prisoner in the jail, and it was driven away by night, no one knew whither.

Then it was rumored about the little seaport that the will of the murderess left all of the vast fortune to her two children, to be held for them by some one unknown, until they became of age; but, where the children were, no one in the town could tell, and a mystery hung over the miser's wife, while the grave seemed to hold the secret inviolate.

CHAPTER III.

THE WRECK.

SOME fifteen years after the hanging of Lola Rutledge, the wife of the old miser, Peter Rutledge, a young sailor came into the little town of G—, and sought a berth as a seaman on board of a brig bound for the Mediterranean Sea.

The vessel belonged to a rich shipping merchant, who had retired from the sea, and was content to let others sail his ships, while he settled down to a life of quiet enjoyment in the riches he had accumulated.

The brig was to sail within a short while, and when the young sailor approached her captain, he saluted politely, and asked for a berth.

"All filled, my lad, and I am sorry, for you look like a fine fellow, the very sort of a man for a seaman."

"Perhaps Captain Ezra Vail, my owner there, can give you a berth on some other ship he owns," and the captain pointed to a well-dressed old gentleman, who stood near, talking with a young man whose resemblance to him proved that they stood in the relationship to each other of father and son.

The sailor though young was splendidly form-

ed, his movements were quick, and his face handsome, fearless and resolute.

"Captain Ezra Vail?" he muttered, and then added:

"No, no, I cannot ask him; and yet he might give me work and I must have it for the sake of others."

"I will do it."

He stepped up to the old merchant and politely saluting, said:

"I would respectfully ask for a berth, sir, upon one of your vessels, if you will be good enough to give me a place."

Captain Vail seemed to change color as he glanced into his face, and said:

"The brig has her crew: but what is your name?"

"Mark Monte, sir."

The merchant started and then turned to his son and said a few words in a low tone, and the young man glanced curiously at the sailor.

"Where do you live, young man?"

"I hail from Salem, sir, where my mother and sister now live, and as I am their only support now I am most anxious to get something to do."

"Yes, yes, I see. And you are a sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"You have a mother and sister, you say?"

"Yes, sir."

"Son of Captain Mark Monte who died several years ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you live at Salem?"

"I do, sir."

Again the old merchant turned to his son, and they whispered together in low tones for a few minutes.

Then a seaman came up with a note and handed it to the merchant, who read it and called out to the brig's skipper:

"Captain Hudson, your second mate cannot go with you, for his wife is dying."

"Too bad, sir; but perhaps the lad there might do in his stead."

"Ah, yes; but do you think you could take the berth of mate, my fine fellow?"

"Ah, yes, sir, for I served with my father as such, when younger."

"Then you shall have the berth, Mr. Mark Monte, so come to the office and let us know how you wish your pay sent, for I suppose half of it goes to your mother?"

"Oh, thank you, sir! yes indeed, all goes to her, except a few dollars a month I will keep for myself."

"You are a good son, and I have no doubt Hudson will find you an excellent officer."

"Go with him, Rupert, to the office, and arrange matters, for I wish to see Selim."

Again the young sailor thanked the merchant and then walked away with the young man toward the shipping office, happy in his success, for to get a mate's berth surpassed his most ardent expectations.

The merchant, as the two walked off, called out:

"Hudson, send Ma'e Selim ashore to me."

"Ay, ay, sir," and Captain Hudson called out to a dark-faced man who was busy forward:

"Mr. Selim, you are wanted ashore by the owner."

The man at once obeyed, and joined the owner, making a low salaam as he joined him.

His bronzed face, jet-black hair and piercing eyes showed that he was of foreign birth, and though dressed in sailor garb he wore instead of a tarpaulin a red silk turban, and a yellow sash about his waist.

He spoke English fairly well, and seemed to look upon Captain Vail with marked respect.

"Selim, I have given you a chance to go as first mate of the brig, because you would have a chance to again visit Egypt, and also because I know that no better seaman can be found than you."

"But I am going to ask you to do something for me that must be a secret between us, and which I would trust to no one else."

"I will obey the Rais,* if it is to risk life for him, for I have not forgotten what I owe to him," was the reply of the Arab, for such he was.

"Come here then," and the captain led the Arab mate further off, to a spot where no one could hear what was said between them, and they talked together for half an hour or more.

Then Mark Monte returned, accompanied by Rupert Vail, and the young sailor again thanked the owner for his kindness.

"Do your duty, Monte, and you will prove your gratitude; but let me present you to officer Selim, and you will doubtless be good friends."

"Now, sir, as the brig was only waiting for the coming of the second mate, whose berth you take, you can go aboard—is that your kit?" and he pointed to a man who was coming with a seaman's chest on his shoulder.

"Yes sir, I sent it up from the stage office just now."

"Well, good-by, and a lucky voyage to you. Farewell, Hudson," and the owner waved his hand to the skipper, who now gave orders to cast

* Arabic for chief, or captain.—THE AUTHOR.

loose the cables, and ten minutes after the pretty brig Dart was sailing out of the harbor of G— with a ten-knot breeze astern of her.

There was one thing that Captain Hudson quickly learned, and that was the fact that the young sailor was as fine an officer as he could have wanted.

His voice, clear as a bell, rung from one end of the vessel to the other, no matter how fierce the winds blew, and he knew just what to do in an emergency and did it.

He was liked by the men from boatswain to cabin-boy, his manners were worthy the quarter-deck of a vessel-of-war, and he was *par excellence*, a seaman.

Selim, the Arab mate, was not a popular officer, though a thorough sailor.

His voice was harsh and his orders were given in a way that the men did not like.

Ever silent, he seemed sullen toward all except the junior mate, and to him he was even more respectful than to his captain.

The Dart was a swift sailer and a stanch craft, and went flying along in her course at a pace that promised to be a very short run to her destination.

But, one night off the coast of Africa she ran into a storm which soon became the fiercest of tempests.

The captain was in command of the vessel, and Mate Selim was on deck with him, while Mark Monte was asleep below.

Suddenly there came a huge wave down upon the brig, the masts snapped like pipe-stems, and in another moment the splendid vessel, a wreck upon the waters, was driven in the darkness and storm upon the rocky coast, striking with a force that shivered her timbers to atoms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEAL OF DEATH.

WHEN Mark Monte reached the deck of the brig, he found that an awful death stared him in the face.

The cries of his despairing comrades, borne off by the waves, reached him above the howling of the winds and the roaring of the waters.

He looked about him to behold no one near, but a groan came to his ears, and springing to the spot, behind a water-cask, he beheld a human form.

"Who are you?" he shouted.

"Mate Selim."

"Where is the captain?"

"Gone."

"And the crew?"

"All gone."

"But you are safe."

"My arm is broken, and I am otherwise hurt."

"The coast is near, for I saw it by that flash of lightning, and there appeared to be a sandy beach—we are on a reef."

"Yes, and doomed."

"No, for I can save you as well as myself."

"I will wait for another flash and—Ha! there it is!"

"Yes, it is a beach—come, I will aid you."

"You can save yourself, but not me—go!"

"I will not desert you, Selim! Come, we live or die together," cried Mark Monte, grasping the Arab mate as he spoke.

The Arab gave a groan, and releasing him, Mark Monte said:

"Hold hard here for an instant."

He dashed down the companionway into the cabin and soon returned.

He held a bundle in his arms and a couple of life-preservers.

One of these he quickly put around the Arab, and the other about himself, making the bundle fast to the latter.

"Come, Selim, hold to me with your unbroken arm—the wreck is going to pieces. Now, spring for it!" cried Mark, and, as a livid glare of lightning came, he and the Arab leaped from the bulwark into the seething waters.

It was a desperate struggle for life—a brave man's struggle against death for the Arab and himself.

He saw now and then by the lightning's livid glare that, unincumbered by the Arab he could readily reach the sandy beach; but, with a helpless man to save, it was doubtful indeed.

The Arab saw this, too, and said:

"Leave me—save yourself!"

"No, it is life or death for both of us," was the determined response, and he struggled on.

And life for both it was, for they at last reached the sands, nearer dead than alive; but up beyond the reach of the waves Mark dragged the Arab mate, and then sunk down, utterly exhausted.

When he at length rallied, he unfastened the bundle tied to his life-preserver and drew out a flask.

"You need this more than I, so drink first," he said, to the Arab, who was watching him, in the dawn of day.

The Arab drank several swallows and handed the flask back with the remark:

"It will strengthen me for awhile; but I cannot live."

"Nonsense, mate! You are only exhausted, and I'll soon set your arm for you."

"No, it is the least of the harm done—it is

here!" and he placed his hand upon his breast, while he continued:

"I am internally hurt—I cannot last long, so let me say what I will."

"What would you say, shipmate?" and Mark could now see, in the early dawn, that the mate was indeed fatally hurt.

"It has been said that my race have no gratitude—but let me prove it a lie. You risked your life to save me, and I saw that you would not desert me."

"But for you I would now be at the bottom of the sea, where all of our shipmates are."

"Allah is great! Allah il Allah!"

"Had you not saved me, you would not have known what now I will tell you. I am an Arab, and Captain Ezra Vail, when in command of a ship that touched at Alexandria, ten years ago, saved me from execution. I never forgot him, never left him, and only to come back here and see my kindred, now that I would not be recognized, I came as mate of the brig."

"But you, Mate Monte, I saw before we met the day you came to the brig. There is one who meant you evil, and who a year ago, set me on your track."

"It was when you returned from the voyage in the ship Zephine, and drew your money at the office of the shipping merchants in Boston."

"There was a good sum coming to you, and you gave your name; it was heard by one present, and he came to me, and told me to follow you and learn where you lived."

"I did follow you, but that night you eluded me in some mysterious way, and I reported to your foe—for bitter enemy I now know him to be of yours—that I had lost you."

"To that enemy I meant to go, on my return from this voyage, and tell him that you were dead, that I had killed you, and my reward would have been a large sum in gold; but you saved my life, and I—will tell you who your enemy is—"

He stopped suddenly—gasped, and as a stream of blood broke from his lips, fell back into the arms of Mark Monte, dead!

Then there came the sound of hoofs, loud, wild cries, and a band of desert horsemen dashed up and surrounded the young sailor.

The Arab was dead, his lips closed ere they had breathed the fateful name he would have uttered, and Mark Monte was a prisoner!

CHAPTER V.

A PRISONER.

THE danger that so suddenly confronted him, caused the young sailor to look to his own safety.

The sun was now rising, and he saw that he was on a coast with a desert stretching away from the sea, here and there broken by oases of date and palm trees.

A quarter of a mile off-shore was a rocky reef, and upon this was the wreck of the unfortunate brig, which, though crushed and dismantled, and with bulwarks torn, yet remained where it had been thrown with such force by a mighty wave.

The tempest had swept away with the coming of dawn, but the waves still beat upon the reef with angry vehemence, and fell upon the sandy beach with sullen roar.

The coast was rugged, sandy, and dunes stretched away up and down the shore as far as the eye could reach.

It was between two sand dunes that the young sailor had found rest with his companion.

There the latter had soon died, with his secret untold, and then Mark Monte had to face those who now confronted him.

They were a band of Arabs, mounted on lean, shaggy ponies, and armed with long lances and guns.

Their dress was picturesque, and their appearance indicated that they were a cruel, savage lot; in other words, mounted wreckers of the coast, roving along the shores, dwelling at will inland or among the sand dunes, and living off the pillaging of wrecks that came ashore.

There were a score of them, and one of them appeared to be of more intelligence than the others, was better mounted and dressed, while his horse was also far above the average among those of his comrades.

"You speak French or Spanish?" he asked in the French language, but with a marked accent and which he had evidently picked up about Alexandria.

Mark Monte's father had been of Spanish descent and so had taught him the language of Spain, and which the young sailor had improved in his voyage to the West Indies and Mexico.

His mother was a Louisianian, and had taught him to speak French fluently. So he replied in French:

"Either, Monsieur le Rais, at your pleasure."

His referring to the Arab as Rais, caused him to say:

"You call me *El Rais*; you have been in Egypt before?"

"No, monsieur, but my friend here who has just died, you see, was an Arab, and he taught me much of Egypt."

"An Arab?" and he turned to his men and

spoke rapidly for a few moments in the Arabic tongue, after which he dismounted and bent over the dead man.

"It is true, monsieur; he is an Arab; but why on that ship?"

"His life was saved by an American officer, and he went to sea with him years ago."

"He was the *Soto Rais*, (second officer) of the vessel, Monsieur le Rais."

"An American ship?"

"Yes."

"They are richly freighted."

"Often."

"Where are the others of your crew?"

The sailor pointed to the bodies on the beach.

"How many had you on board?"

"Thirteen, Monsieur le Rais."

The Arab Rais at once turned to one of his men and gave a command.

The man rode away, and while he was gone along the shore the chief talked to his men.

Then the Arab returned and made a report.

"There are eleven there, and you and this man here—thirteen."

"You are my prisoner."

"But you will carry me to Alexandria for ransom?" asked Mark Monte, who had hoped, as the man had spoken almost kindly, and intelligently to him, he would not be ill-treated and forced into a cruel slavery.

"No, you are young, strong, and will be a good slave for me."

"I need you, and from to-day you are Mourad my slave."

"If you serve me well, you shall have food in plenty; if you do not I shall beat you; if you attempt to escape I shall kill you—Allah il Allah—you are my slave."

The broad breast of the sailor rose and fell with emotion, and into his eyes flashed a wicked look; but he bowed his head to his fate, while he muttered to himself:

"I will bide my time," and wearied and wretched though he was he went to his work to aid in getting the stores off of the wrecked brig.

The Arab village soon came up, and when the sea had gone down, they went out in skin boats and brought the cargo ashore.

Several days passed away, and then a camel-train set off with the plunder to sell in the towns, while Rais Ayoub, the Arab chief, sent the young sailor back with his tribe into the desert.

Nearly three years passed away, and in a man mounted upon a fine large camel, that looked wearied out, few would have recognized Mark Monte, as he rode along the coast, his eyes glancing seaward and over the desert alternately.

He was in Arab costume, his hair and beard had grown long and his face was as bronzed as even those of the desert to whom he had so long been a slave, treated with a cruelty that would have broken most men's hearts, soul, and body.

"My God! will I find no ship in sight?"

"Must I be retaken and carried back to my life of slavery, after all that I have endured of cruellest suffering, and risked to make my escape?"

As he spoke he rode around a bend of the coast.

There was not a breath of air stirring, and the hot sun poured down relentlessly upon his turbaned head.

Suddenly from his lips broke a wild shout, one wrung from his heart in very joy, for there, lying becalmed not a mile off shore, was a large vessel.

At the same moment almost, he glanced over the desert, and beheld a number of Arab horsemen coming toward him.

"It is Ayoub, my master; but master no longer, for there is freedom!" and he pointed to the ship.

"Farewell, my good camel, Habib! You have served me well and willingly. Farewell."

He patted the camel affectionately, and springing to the ground, ran into the sea to swim to the ship, just as with wild yells, the young American sailor's Arab master and his horsemen came dashing toward him at full speed.

Reaching the sand dunes, the Arabs saw their prisoner swimming rapidly and boldly out over the waves, and they emptied their blunderbusses at him, but without effect.

He reached the ship, an English vessel, told his story of misfortune, and was carried to Liverpool, from whence he shipped as seaman to work his way on board an American barque bound to Boston.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FATAL PLEDGE.

"THE woman is dying, sir, and cannot be moved."

"Dying or dead, move her, I say, for she shall no longer live on my bounty, and I can let the cottage to a good tenant the moment she is out of it."

"Move her, I say!"

The speaker was a hard-faced man of fifty, with iron-gray hair, bronzed face and the air of one well-blessed with this world's goods.

The one he addressed was in seaman's dress, a sturdy-looking sailor of two-score years.

The two stood at the gate of a little cottage on the shores of Salem Harbor, and within, on the porch, were four other men, also in sailor garb.

A wagon stood before the door, and Captain Ezra Vail, the wealthy ship merchant, had gone himself to remove from his cottage the Widow Monte, who had not paid her rent for nearly a year.

The seaman whom he addressed so sternly went back to his comrades on the porch, and held a short conversation in a low tone with them.

Then he returned, and saluting the merchant politely, said:

"Capt'n, if it's ther same to you, sir, we lads will let you take the rest out o' our wages when we sail, sir, in one o' your ships, so as not to disturb the poor lady."

"We knows she has been ill, and her daughter has had all she could do ter care for her, and work a little for bread and medicines, and Master Mark is away, more than likely at the bottom of the sea—"

"Silence, for I want gold, not talk, and you and your mates would slip off and sail in another ship than mine, and leave me in the lurch for the rent."

"Move her out, I say, and up to yonder barn, if you wish to earn your pay, and if not I'll get others who will obey me."

The man turned back to the cottage and made his report, and a moment after a young girl came out of the house and approached the landlord, who was eagerly watching to see if he would be obeyed.

The girl was scarcely over eighteen, and yet her form was perfection in symmetry, her face one of a beauty most rare.

She was dressed in plain homespun, wore no ornament, and yet appeared the lady.

"Captain Vail, your man told you the truth—my mother is dying, and if you will only let her die in peace, in a couple of days you can have your house," and her voice as she spoke was low and rich of tone.

"Ethel Monte, you know on what terms your mother can remain in the cottage, and my son Rupert told me last night you again refused his offer, and so I now refuse you what you ask."

"I am betrothed to another, Captain Vail, I do not love your son—more, I hate and despise him, and it is useless to ask me to marry him, for I cannot, will not do it."

"Then out of doors your mother goes, girl, dying or not."

"So be it—do your worst; but some day, Ezra Vail, there will come a time for you to beg for mercy, and your prayer, like mine, will not be heeded."

"Ah! if Verdel were only here!"

"But alas! I fear he is dead, dead! and— Oh God I thank Thee!"

The last words of the young girl fairly came from her lips in a shriek, as suddenly around a bend in the road came a young man.

She sprang toward him and threw herself into his arms, and for a moment no word was spoken.

Then she said:

"Mark, my brother, we had given you up for dead; but you are just in time, for your poor mother is dying, and Captain Ezra Vail here, is going to put her out for non-payment of rent the year past."

"My God! and I have walked from Boston here, because I had not a cent to pay my way."

"Dying? mother dying? No, no, it cannot be so hard as that, Ethel?" and he seemed dazed by the news he had heard.

"It is as bad, ay, worse even, Mark, for we are almost starving, and mother is to be put out of the cottage to die in yonder barn."

"No, no! Captain Vail will not be the man to do this crime, Ethel."

"There can something be done, though I am penniless, for I was wrecked on the coast of Africa nearly three years ago in his brig, the Dart, and have been a prisoner of cruel Arab masters ever since."

"I escaped, and worked my way back to Boston. Yes, something can be done, surely."

"Yes, if I promise to marry Rupert Vail, mother can die in peace here in the cottage."

"What! you, my sister, marry Rupert Vail?"

"No, a thousand times no, for you shall commit no such crime, for crime it would be."

"I will speak to Ezra Vail," and he strode up to the merchant with form erect and eyes flashing.

"Captain Vail, do you not know me, Mark Monte, and can it be true that you intend to put my dying mother out of her home?"

"It is true unless you have the rent to pay me," and Ezra Vail seemed strangely moved at sight of the sailor.

"You heard what I just said, sir, and must know that I was wrecked in your brig, whose fate you must have guessed."

"But I return to my home penniless, utterly so!"

"I care not for that for I have to mourn the loss of my brig; but I want my money, or, if your sister is willing to marry my son Rupert, who loves her most dearly, your mother shall

have every care up to her death, ay, and a monument over her when she is in the grave if that will please you; while I'll give you another chance on one of my vessels, yes, as first mate, though you did lose my brig for me."

"Captain Vail, I was not in command as you know, and, but for the fact that my mother lies a within few yards of us, dying, I would hurl you into the sea; you, into whose teeth I now fling the words; you whom my father befriended and whose fortune you now hold, while his wife is dying, ay, of starvation I take it, and whose children have not a dollar to call their own. In my need, three years ago, I asked you for a berth, and you gave it me; but now I say begone; or I shall forget myself and kill you, Ezra Vail."

The man shrunk back before the angry face of the enraged young sailor, but called out:

"Ho, men! this hand would kill me—you heard his threat? I'll drag you before the law, Mark Monte, and then you shall see what my hate can be—I am a special constable, I'll let you know, and—"

He paused, for the expression of the sailor's face fairly startled him.

Mark Monte knew that he could arrest him and drag him away to prison, leaving his mother to die with only his sister by her side, and that sister at the mercy of those whom he hated.

So he said pleadingly:

"Ezra Vail, if you will go away and leave my mother to die in peace, leave my sister and myself alone, until she is in her grave, I will pledge my honor to work for you until this debt is paid, ay, I will sell myself to you for any service you may demand of me to cancel the indebtedness between us."

The face of Ezra Vail flushed with triumph, as he heard the words of the young sailor, and he said eagerly:

"Bring me pen, ink and paper, Ethel."

The maiden hastily went after the articles named, and the others stood by in a silence that was awkward to all.

Soon Ethel returned and her words were heard:

"Mother is sinking fast, brother."

The young sailor gritted his teeth and said, savagely:

"Come, be quick with what you are going to do, Ezra Vail."

The merchant hastily wrote a few lines, leaving the paper upon the gate-post, and said, sternly:

"Sign that, sir."

Mark Monte cast his eyes over it hastily and said, aloud:

"In consideration of the canceling of the rent on Cliff Cottage, now due, and ten days longer use of the place from date, I, Mark Monte, hereby solemnly pledge myself in honor bound, to serve Ezra Vail, as he may demand of me."

Quickly the young sailor took the pen and wrote his name boldly at the end of the few lines whose fearful import he little dreamed of. Alas! if he could but have known!

CHAPTER VII.

DOGGED BY DISASTER.

MARK MONTE was well-born, for no prouder family than the Montes had lived in New England, at the time of the breaking out of the Revolutionary War.

The grandfather of Mark Monte had been exiled from Spain, and was a Spanish noble, who had sought a refuge in America.

He had brought his family with him, a beautiful wife and a son who had been a midshipman in the navy of Spain at the time his father was exiled, and he had also brought with him a good-sized fortune, which had enabled him to build for himself a fine mansion near Boston.

When the War of the Revolution began, the Don had built a swift-sailing craft, armed, equipped, and manned her at his own expense, and placed his son in command.

That son was the father of Mark Monte, and when the war ended with the triumph of the Americans over Great Britain, he was made a captain in the navy of the United States, for he had won distinction as a commander of his fine schooner, and rendered a vast deal of service to the Government.

His father, the Don, had died during the war, and his property, which he had invested mostly in merchant vessels, was reduced greatly, so the heir did not inherit the riches he had expected.

But Captain Monte was not a man to bewail over misfortune, and he went to work with a will to recover from the blow as soon and as well as possible.

He sold out his old home in Boston, bought a small place in G—, and invested the rest of his money in a merchant vessel, which he placed under command of a competent captain by the name of Ezra Vail.

For several years all went well, and Captain Monte returned from a three years' cruise in the brig-of-war to which the Government had assigned him, to find himself comparatively rich once more.

He fell in love with a beautiful girl, whom he met in Boston, and who was the sister of a brother officer of the navy to whom he owed his life on two separate occasions.

His love for the beautiful girl was reciprocated, and after a few months of courtship he made her his wife and carried her off to his home in G—."

After a couple of years spent on a home station, Captain Monte was ordered away on a cruise in foreign seas, and he sailed with the knowledge that he was once more a rich man, for several fine clipper ships now belonged to him, and he left the management of his affairs to the firm of Ezra Vail & Co., who had done so much to build up his fortune for him.

Captain Ezra Vail himself still continued at sea, in command of a large clipper ship running between Boston and London, and his partner managed the business of his shipping house at home in G—.

Whatever the cause, certain it was that ill-fortune began to dog the naval commander soon after he had sailed for a three years' cruise in foreign seas.

One of his vessels sailed, never to be heard of again, and another was wrecked on an island of the West Indies, while a third was abandoned at sea.

Then, to add to his misfortunes, his house in G— took fire one night and was burned to the ground.

Captain Monte, on learning of his losses, at once resigned from the navy and returned home.

He knew that he had again to start at the foundation to build up a fortune, and with the remnant left to him of his riches he purchased a vessel and taking command of it himself, began work anew.

Not wishing his wife to dwell in poverty, where she had lived in prosperity, he moved to Salem and purchased a small cottage for her and the two children who were added to his home circle.

It was said that the firm of Ezra Vail & Co. had also to go to the wall from losses met with; but from some reason they pulled through, from outside help they explained, and in a short while were as prosperous as ever: but Captain Monte looked upon them as having built themselves up on his losses.

What reason he had to feel so, he did not explain, but as his son grew up from boyhood, he often heard his father brooding over his misfortunes, and always when in such mood he was wont to say that Ezra Vail had grown rich on his money, and where he had looked upon him as an honest man and a friend he had found him out to be a robber and his foe.

And from other things he heard, young Mark discovered that Ezra Vail had been rejected by his mother several years before she had met his father, and this had caused him to hate his successful rival, though pretending friendship for him.

Soon after his refusal by Mark Monte's mother Ezra Vail had married a lady who was said to be an heiress, but this he found out to be a mistake, as her guardian had run through with her fortune.

Rumor had it that it was well for the poor young wife that she died, when her little son was but an infant, as already had her husband caused her many a day of sorrow.

What tenderness there was in Ezra Vail's nature all went out to his little boy, Rupert, and he had made a vow that at his death he would leave him the largest fortune in New England.

A scholar, as well as a sailor, Captain Monte had devoted himself to the teaching of his son, leaving his wife, a most accomplished lady, to educate their daughter, Ethel.

Thus it was that Mark went with his father on his voyages, beginning on the humble little schooner which Captain Monte just purchased with the remnant of his fortune, and, from that to a brig, then a barque and, as he became more prosperous, at last possessing a large clipper ship that ran between Boston, Havana, Vera Cruz and New Orleans.

Was it an Evil Destiny that dogged the life of the gallant naval officer, that caused him to again lose his fortune, for one night in the Gulf the splendid ship sprang a leak, and the crew were forced to take to the boats.

Mark, though not more than eighteen, was third mate, and went in command of the cutter carrying the passengers, for his father knew what a cool head he had on young shoulders, and also that no better sailor ever trod a deck.

When the cutter reached Key West, and the other boats also began to come in, Mark Monte learned that his father, against every appeal, had refused to leave his ship, and so had been left to his fate, to go down in the splendid vessel to the bottom of the Gulf.

It was a terrible story for the young sailor to carry home to his mother and sister; but they bore up bravely under their sorrow, and reduced to poverty once more the gallant young sailor was forced to at once go to sea as upon him had devolved the support of those so dear to him.

He had failed to secure a place on board of any vessel out of Salem, so had gone to Boston to there meet with no better success.

Then he had heard of a chance in G—, and so it was that Mark Monte had shipped as second mate on the Dart, a brig owned by Ezra

Vail, the man whom his father had said had robbed him and was his bitter foe.

But with the loved ones in the little cottage depending upon him, Mark Monte had subdued his pride and sailed in the good brig Dart, which had been wrecked on the coast of Africa, and the young sailor, the sole survivor, had found himself the slave of a cruel Arab master.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SECRET.

EZRA VAIL came of a good New England stock.

His father had been captain of a whaler out of Salem, and had left his son a good start in the world.

Ezra was a good sailor, and had been mate of his father's ship until his death, when he took command.

He was handsome, without being attractive, possessed a good figure, and was so particular about his dress that he became known as the "Dandy Captain" of the whaling fleet.

His family, and his possessing riches, supposed to be far greater than what in reality he had, added to his fashionable appearance when ashore, gave him the *entree* to the best society, and he was looked upon as a good "catch" by all.

He had met in society Lola La Salle, a lovely girl whom he fell desperately in love with at first sight.

But soon after, and ere he could offer himself, Lola La Salle disappeared in a mysterious manner.

Some said that she had run away and gotten married to one beneath her; but no one seemed to know the truth of the affair.

But certain it was, if dead, the family did not go in mourning for her, and soon after her very mysterious disappearance Merchant La Salle, her father, who was known to be financially embarrassed and was expected to fail, suddenly paid all of his debts and retired from business, many said a rich man.

It was a hard blow to Ezra Vail, this loss of his lady love; but he consoled himself by transferring his affections to the lovely sister of Lola La Salle: but in spite of all urging to accept him, she declined his offer, and afterward became the wife of Captain Roland Monte, a particular friend of her brother, who was also a naval officer.

It was said, by those who knew him best, that Ezra Vail had never forgiven Captain Monte for his success with the one who had refused his love, and there was surprise among many when the naval officer intrusted to the shipping house of Vail & Co. his entire fortune.

But, while the naval officer had lost his all, the merchant Captain had grown rich.

After his loss of wealth Captain Monte had moved to Salem, and Ezra Vail had lost sight of the family until the day when Mark Monte had presented himself, driven by stern necessity, to seek a berth in the brig, now after he knew where she belonged.

Rupert, the son of Ezra Vail, was a handsome man than his father had been at his age.

He had received an education at Harvard, though he had also been much to sea upon his father's vessels and was considered a good sailor.

With a bright mind he had stood well in his classes, and with an extravagant disposition he had lived a very fast life while a student, but, when his father, after allowing him a year's respite, made him a partner in the firm, and gave him the management of it, he hoped that he would settle down.

Father and son lived in a fine old mansion, surrounded by handsome grounds, and it seemed their pleasure to make a display.

If they spent money liberally, the gossips used to assert that the poor would have to suffer accordingly, for rents were raised and wages cut down, to make up for what had gone in luxuries for Vail and his son.

"Well, Rupert, what do you think of that?" Captain Vail had asked of his son, as they waved a last farewell to the brig.

"I think she is a fine vessel, father, and will make a rapid and prosperous voyage," was the response of the son, who followed his father in his love of showy dress, and was noted for wearing the most stylish clothes of any one in G—.

Then, too, Rupert Vail was fond of jewelry, and wore a handsome ruby ring on the small finger of his left hand, a beautiful diamond pin in his black silk scarf, and a massive watch-chain stretched over his velvet vest.

"Why, Rupert, how stupid you are," said the father, impatiently.

"I am your son."

The old merchant smiled, for he thought his son anything but stupid.

But he said:

"That's good, very; like father, like son, you mean; but I meant when I asked the question, what did you think of our finding the Montes again?"

"Ah, yes! that was the son of Captain Monte, who lived in G—, some years ago."

"Well, you are beginning to see at last what I am after."

"Yes, he is Captain Roland's son."

"I thought that you and the elder Monte

were enemies, on account of his having put his money in your firm, against your experience, and while you kept your experience, father, he lost his money?" and the young man laughed.

"I did not send you to college, sir, to sharpen your wit to me on your father."

"Well, was it not about as I said, for gossip has it so?"

"He was unfortunate in his vessels, and so laid the blame on me; but I have found out by accident what I would have given much to discover."

"And that is—"

"Where the Montes were living."

"In Salem, so the youth gave his address."

"Yes, and the father is dead and left the family destitute."

"What did you pay the young man as mate?"

"He left all to be sent monthly to his mother, except sixty dollars, which he said he would keep for his own use."

"I gave him the pay of the man whose place he took—seventy per month."

"You might have made it sixty."

"Well, that sum goes to his mother at Salem, and I gave him, as I said, an advance of ten per month for six months."

"He wrote his mother a line at the office, telling her of his going, but what is your interest in the youth, father?"

"That is a secret which I must tell you, so you will understand all I wish you to do."

"Wish me to do?"

"Yes, the boy has a sister, and I have picked her out for your wife," was the surprising response of Captain Vail to his son's question.

CHAPTER IX.

WANDA, THE WITCH OF SALEM.

THE cottage of the Montes was on the shore of Salem Harbor, and a very pretty spot it was.

There were a couple of acres of ground, for a vegetable garden, a small grove of pines, and a flower garden, the latter being the especial care of Ethel Monte.

The cottage had five rooms in it, large and comfortable, was well furnished, and though the loss of her husband was a great sorrow to her, she could have been happy in her little home with her children, were it not that Mark had to also be off from home leading the life of a sailor upon the treacherous sea.

One pleasant afternoon, the second day after the sailing of the brig Dart, the widow was seated upon her little piazza thinking of her lost husband, and her noble boy then away striving to get a berth on board of some vessel, when Ethel, who had been gone an hour or more to the village was seen walking rapidly homeward.

"A letter from Mark, mother," she cried, as she entered the little gate.

"Poor fellow, I hope he has found work, but will not have to go far away," and as the widow spoke she broke the seal and read the letter aloud.

It was dated at G— and was as follows:

"MY DEAR MOTHER:—"

"I have time only for a line to say that I stumbled upon good luck, half an hour after reaching G—, to which place I walked."

"I found the brig Dart, just ready to sail, waiting only for her second mate, and word came from him just as I asked for a berth on board, that his wife was dying and he could not go."

"So the place was given to me, at seventy dollars per month."

"Now is not that good fortune?"

"I drew sixty dollars, and that amount will keep me, so you receive each month a check for my pay, less ten dollars."

"I must tell you that the brig belongs to Ezra Vail & Co., but I cannot be particular, so sail in her, though I remember father always regarded Captain Vail as a bitter foe."

"Will write you by every opportunity—address me care of American Brig Dart, Alexandria, Egypt."

"With all my love to you and Ethel, believe me,"

"Your dutiful and loving son,"

"MARK MONTE."

A cloud passed over the widow's face as she finished the letter, and Ethel cried:

"What good fortune for brother! but I am sorry he had to go so far away."

"It is the last thing I would have had him do, Ethel, sail in a vessel belonging to Ezra Vail; but it cannot be helped now, and I know that his desire to provide for us alone caused him to do so."

"Is that the Mr. Vail, mother, who defrauded father of his fortune?"

"Yes, my child, it is the same man, Ezra Vail, and I only hope no ill-fortune will befall Mark for having shipped under the merchant flag of that man."

She was still a lovely woman but very sad-looking, for her suffering and sorrow had stamped her face indelibly.

Ethel was not like her, as far as resemblance was concerned, but she was very beautiful, and promised to be more so when she budged forth into womanhood, for she was scarcely sixteen.

Her eyes were dark-blue, shaded by long, dark lashes, and her hair was of a bronze hue that shone like gold in the sunlight.

"Ethel, there is a vessel that sails to-morrow for the Mediterranean, so I will write Mark at

once, if you will carry it to town and post it for me?"

"You can go in your skiff if you are tired walking."

"I will gladly go, mother, and I'll get the skiff ready," and Ethel went to the little wharf in front of the house, hoisted sail on the little skiff her brother had built for her, and was all ready when her mother came out with the letter.

"The wind is fair for your going and coming, and you will be back before sunset; but do not delay, as I fear there will be a storm," and the widow glanced at some dark clouds rising far away in the westward.

A moment after the little skiff was skimming away under pressure of a light breeze, and heading up the harbor toward the town.

The letter was delivered and Ethel was on her way to her skiff when she met an old creature of whom all in Salem stood in dread.

She was an old woman, bent with age, with snow-white hair and an appearance of mischief that had gained for her the name of a Witch.

She was known in Salem as Wanda the Witch, and had lived there for a score of years, having appeared there one day searching for her son, who she said had sailed from his home and never returned.

Taken ill she had remained there and made Salem her home, establishing herself in a little hut over on the further shore in a small grove.

Every ship that sailed she sent a letter by to her son, and every vessel that entered the port she boarded, expecting to find her lost boy.

She had gone about "telling fortunes," and so near the truth had she struck on many occasions that she became famous, and ere many years went by she was dreaded by the superstitious as possessing powers of witchcraft.

Sailors when going to sea often went to her lone cabin and paid liberally for a charm to protect them from shipwreck, and it was said if any incurred her displeasure and a ship went to sea under her curse, the vessel met some cruel fate.

When Mark Monte was quite a youth, he came upon some boys of his own age jeering Wanda the Witch one day, and one threw a stone at her and felled her to the ground.

Instantly Mark sprung upon him and gave him a severe thrashing, and then he aided Wanda to her own hut, dressed the wound for her, for the stone had cut a gash in her scalp, and from that day he had never been forgotten.

The next day he had sailed over to the hut with Ethel, who had carried the old woman some food, and thus she too had received the blessing of a "witch."

Now, as Ethel, when hurrying back to her skiff came upon Wanda the Witch, she found her in a rage, for some one had set her boat adrift.

"Get into my skiff, Wanda, and we will soon pick yours up," said Ethel, and the old woman obeyed her.

As the hideous old creature, hump-backed, evil-eyed, dressed in a red dress, and with necklaces of weird charms hung about her neck, sat in front of her, Ethel could hardly hide her dread of her.

Her snow-white hair hung down her back, and upon her head was a crown of thorns, which with her costume, deep-set eyes, hook nose, and dark complexion, made her look like a fiend inhuman.

The boat was soon overtaken going out on the tide, but as it was not far to Wanda's hut, Ethel said she would land her there and did so.

"Poor child, sorrows will come upon you in life, tears will dim those bright eyes, but Wanda, the Witch, will be your friend."

"Go, for a storm is coming, and there's death in the howling winds," and the witch sprung ashore, and waved her hand in farewell.

Ethel now saw that the storm was threatening to burst at any moment, and she sped away for home at the full speed of her little skiff.

She beheld a fine brig running for an anchorage in port, yet taking in sail as she came along to meet the tempest with as little canvas set as possible.

The little skiff fairly flew over the waters, the spray dashed over her, and she had begun to hope she would yet make home before the storm burst in its fury, when, as she passed under the stern of the brig, came the ringing cry from the quarter-deck:

"For God's sake, lower your sail, young lady, and take to your oars!"

CHAPTER X.

THE WHALER CAPTAIN.

THE brig that was running in to seek an anchorage in Salem Harbor, before the breaking of the storm upon her, was a very beautiful craft from hull to trucks.

Her hull was sharp forward, lean amidships, and her stern had a most graceful curve, causing a most perfect symmetry in the vessel's model.

Her bowsprit ran far out ahead, tapered to a very small point, and not only were her main sticks very tall and shapely, but the topmasts

were of exceeding length, showing that she could spread a very large quantity of sail.

There was considerable distance between the masts, giving her an odd look for a brig, and her main boom was of great length, extending far out over the stern.

Altogether the brig looked as trim as a yacht, or vessel-of-war, instead of a merchant craft, which her being devoid of an armament proved her to be.

She carried the Stars and Stripes, and upon her decks, taking in sail as nimbly as men-of-war's-men, were a score of young seamen, dressed in blue shirts, white duck pants, and red skull-caps, which gave them a picturesque appearance.

There were three officers visible upon her decks, all of them young men, and dressed with a nicety not often seen in the merchant service.

One of these stood upon the quarter-deck, and he it was who had called out to Ethel Monte to lower her sail and trust to her oars.

He was scarcely over twenty-three, his face was smoothly shaven and bronzed by the sun and wind into a rich, healthy hue.

His eyes were black, and they were most expressive, large and gentle, while waves of curling brown hair fell upon the collar of his sailor jacket.

When he called out to Ethel there was a ring to his voice that showed he was one to command; but hardly had the words left his lips when the storm struck, and seemed to fairly lift the skiff into the air and dash it furiously back into the waters.

In spite of striving hard to cling to the boat, Ethel was torn from it by the waves, and death stared her in the face.

Then came the command:

"Struggle hard for your life until I reach you!"

Hardly had he uttered the cheering words to Ethel, when he sung out in professional tones:

"Man overboard! Lower away the life-boat!" and with the command the young commander of the brig sprang from the deck to the rescue of Ethel Monte.

Fortunately for Ethel, she could swim a little, and so did not lose her presence of mind as she found herself in the now wild waters.

She saw the brig sweep on, heard the command of the young officer to herself, and afterward the cry of "man overboard!"

"How noble of him to risk his life in a boat to save mine," she murmured, even in that awful moment of danger.

The storm was now at its fiercest; the waves were rising high, forming great hills and valleys of water, while the spray was driven into her face with a force that stung as though it had been sand.

But in the blinding mist she saw the brig sweep up into the teeth of the storm, and the rattle of the cable as the anchor was let go came to her ears, while the creaking of blocks told her that the life-boat was being lowered to her rescue.

"Heaven have mercy upon me! I can hold up but a short while longer," she cried, wearied out with fighting the wild waters for life.

"Courage, lady, for I will save you."

Ethel uttered a cry at the cheering voice so near her, and beheld the brig's commander within a few yards of her.

A moment more and he grasped her around her waist, while he said, in the same encouraging voice:

"You have done well, miss, and there is no danger now."

No danger and in that mad sea!

She could but glance into the face of the bold man.

It did not belie his words, for it was utterly fearless, and there was not the slightest quiver in the clear tones as they rung out:

"Ho, the life-boat ahoy! Two points off your weather bow, ahoy!"

A cheer came from the crew as the man in the bows heard and saw his commander, and he gave the officer at the tiller directions how to steer.

A minute more and the command came:

"Way 'nough! steady! Now, coxswain, lend a hand to the captain!"

The coxswain stretched forth his hands, and drew Ethel into the boat, and, almost unaided, the daring rescuer followed.

"To the shore, Weller! The lady lives in yonder white cottage, and there is a little haven to the right," said the young captain, after bowing to the men's cheers.

CHAPTER XI.

WITHOUT HOPE.

MRS. MONTE had regretted, the moment after Ethel had sailed in the skiff to the town, that she had allowed her to go in the face of a coming storm, though it was yet a long way off.

But she knew that Ethel was noted as a sailor, and had a great deal of nerve, knowing just what to do if caught in the blow, so she returned to her duties in the house.

A peal of thunder caused her to drop her work and go out upon the porch, and to her horror she saw that the storm had come up more rapid-

ly than she had expected it would, and she saw the skiff yet a long way off.

"She is carrying full sail, anxious to reach home before it catches her," she said, and then added in great distress:

"Heaven help her! she can never do it!"

And standing there on the edge of the little curve in the shore, which formed a safe haven near the cottage, Mrs. Monte, with white face and lips murmuring in prayer, saw all that happened.

When the young captain sprang ashore he aided Ethel to follow him, and said pleasantly:

"Now, miss, I'll say good-by."

"Not until I, too, have thanked you, sir, from the depths of a mother's heart for your noble rescue of my child."

"Will you not come in, sir, for this is our home, and I can give you some dry clothing that belongs to my son, who, like yourself, is a sailor," and Mrs. Monte grasped the hand of the sailor, who answered pleasantly:

"I must return, thank you, Mrs. Monte, for your daughter told me her name, to look after my vessel, which is not just safe where she is; but if you will allow me to call to-morrow to see if your daughter has suffered from her adventure, I will call with pleasure."

"You are ever welcome, sir, to a home that your courage to day has saved from being a house of mourning."

The next afternoon Ethel heard a knock at the front door, and going to see who it was, her face flushed as she beheld the very one who had been in her thoughts all day.

"I have kept my promise, you see, Miss Monte," and Captain Meredith, dressed in a handsome uniform stood before her.

"You are indeed welcome, sir, for now I can thank you in a more befitting manner than I did yesterday when I was half dead with fright."

"No, you are a very brave young lady, Miss Monte, and I am more than happy to have served you, and it was by a mere accident that I ran into Salem too, to land here a poor shipwrecked fellow we picked up at sea yesterday, and who hails from this port."

"Indeed! then your kindness to the shipwrecked sailor was the means of your saving my life; 'you are bound to Boston I suppose?' said Ethel, anxious to find out something more of this handsome, fearless young captain.

"I am bound anywhere that I can get a cargo, Miss Monte, for I may say that I am a Sailor of Fortune, my brig being my home, and I cruise wherever my will carries me."

"My father left me the brig, when he died, and a few thousands in gold in the cabin locker and told me to make my fortune in her."

"She is a beautiful craft, I have as fine a crew of young fellows, officers and men, as ever trod a deck, and in the year we have been cruising in the Sea Dove, Miss Monte, I have paid my way, lived well, enjoyed life and have trebled the amount of gold my father left in the locker for me."

"Now you know all about Malcolm Meredith, who is proud of having been the humble means of helping you out of Davy Jones's Locker."

There was something so irresistibly fascinating about the gallant young captain, his voice was so rich in tone, his manner so free and easy, yet respectful, and his face so handsome and fearless, that Ethel felt drawn to him with an interest so deep that she could not but know that it was the corner-stone of love.

Mrs. Monte, who had been absent in the village, now returned, and as the young sailor of fortune had completely won her heart, she urged him to remain and have tea with them, which invitation he accepted with the remark:

"Gladly, for I have no home other than my vessel, and my kindred are all in their graves, so it makes me happy to be in a cosy home once more," and both mother and daughter noticed a look of inexpressible sadness suddenly dim the brightness of his eyes and cast a cloud upon his face.

But it was momentary, and he soon was the free-and-easy, light-hearted sailor once more, and so entertaining did they find him that it was late before they permitted him to take his leave.

For two weeks did the Sea Dove remain in Salem Harbor, and each day found the young captain a visitor at Cliff Cottage.

Then he decided to sail for the north and join the Salem whalers and return with a cargo that would bring him again to that port.

It may have been because he saved her life that Ethel lost her heart so readily to the young sailor of fortune, it may have been because he had snatched her out of the very jaws of death, that he felt she belonged to him; but certain it was, when the Sea Dove set sail for the whale fisheries, there was an exchange of hearts between Ethel Monte and Malcolm Meredith, and, young as her daughter was, Mrs. Monte said no word to cast a cloud upon her future.

Several days after the sailing of the Sea Dove, another visitor called at Cliff Cottage.

This was none other than Mr. Rupert Vail, of G—.

He introduced himself in an easy, courtly way, said that he had been called to Salem on business, and as Mate Mark Monte, of the brig Dart, had asked him to see that his mother received the remittance assigned to her, he had taken the liberty of personally calling to give it to her.

Mrs. Vail introduced her daughter, and, remembering that it was hardly fair to visit the father's sins upon the son, and more, that Mark was then in the service of the visitor, she was quite gracious, thanked him most kindly, and, as he said he would be detained in Salem for several days and knew no one there, she asked him to call again.

This did Rupert Vail, and more, each month he brought the money himself for Mrs. Monte, until at last he declared his love for Ethel and asked her to become his wife.

CHAPTER XII.

A REFUSAL AND A THREAT.

MRS. MONTE had not been blind to the intentions of Rupert Vail.

She knew that he loved Ethel, and she could not well see how he could help it; but then she did not like the man.

There was one thing that drew her toward him, and that was his likeness to Mark.

It was not fancy, but reality, for in form, bearing and general look of the face they were strangely alike, only a close observer would have seen that the character and fearlessness stamped upon the features of Mark Monte were lacking with Rupert Vail.

Still this resemblance did not cause the widow to like the young merchant.

He was intelligent, talked well, had courtly manners, though at times, when off his guard, they were abrupt in the extreme.

He was proud too, and boastful of the fortune his father would leave him when he died.

At times Mrs. Monte almost feared that Ethel was interested in him, and so one day she said to her:

"Ethel, are you forgetting Captain Meredith?"

"Mother!"

It was all she said, but there was much reproach and injury thrown into the one word.

That very evening Rupert Vail asked Ethel to take a walk with him along the shore.

Her face flushed, she seemed to anticipate what was coming, but she went.

She was not mistaken in her surmise, for he told her that he loved her, and, without asking for her love in return, seemed too, in his great conceit, to believe she could not resist it, and told her that it would please him to set an early day for their marriage.

"But, Mr. Vail, I do not love you!" she said.

"Not love me?"

The idea seemed preposterous to him. He could not realize it, and gazed at her with an indignant stare.

He, whom scores of rich young girls would be only too glad to get, was not loved by this poor maiden who dwelt in an humble cottage, and whose brother, a mate on a brig, got only seventy dollars a month.

"Come, Ethel, I know you find it hard to believe, and think I am joking, and wish to flatter you; but I am in earnest, really I am."

"You are a very beautiful girl, and folks say your mother has educated you better than even you could have been at the fashionable schools in Boston, while I have heard you sing, and like your voice exceedingly; but you need to practice a little more my style, as I showed you, on the guitar."

"The sketches and water colors you have in the cottage are passably good, showing some talent in you, and I have had reason to know that you understand housekeeping, while, with your moderate means you really dress better than the rich girls do."

"So, Ethel, altogether I am not ashamed to ask you to be my wife, and—"

He stopped short, for he caught sight of her face.

There was a look in it that fairly frightened him.

Then came her words, crisp, no mistaking them and their meaning:

"Mr. Rupert Vail, let me tell you distinctly that I consider it no honor to have you offer me your hand and name, while, as for love, a man of your intense conceit could never set his affection on a human being other than himself."

"Why, Ethel Monte, you are insulting," he said, fiercely.

"Ah! to reflect your own words upon yourself is insulting, is it?"

"Well, I mean just what I say, that I do not love you, and consider it no honor to have your regard, as you bestow it as an act of charity and condescension upon a poor girl."

"I am poor, but I have not lost my pride."

"My brother is mate upon one of your vessels, but he is a gentleman as well, and earns all that you pay him."

"I have treated you kindly, because I deemed you kind to him; but when you take it as a matter of course, that you have only to say that you will marry me, for me to jump at the

chance, I beg you to understand that you are mistaken."

Ethel had lost her temper, but it was no wonder, when considering the conceit of the man.

He saw that he was no match for her, that he had made a mistake; but he was too furious to reason, and he fairly hissed forth the words:

"Ethel Vail, when I make up my mind to a purpose, I carry it through."

"I have made up my mind that you shall be my wife, and you shall be, come what may."

"I have heard that you had a lover, the captain of a craft that has an unsavory record; but you shall now know all that he is."

"When you come to your senses, send for me; but until then adieu!"

He wheeled quickly on his heel, and walked away.

But his words had left an unpleasant impression in the mind of Ethel, about what he had hinted of Malcolm Meredith!

From that day misfortune seemed to fall upon the mother and daughter, for soon after word came that a vessel had been lost off the African Coast, which could have been no other than the brig, Dart, for wreckage bearing her name had been picked up by a homeward-bound craft.

The pay of the young mate was at once stopped by Vail & Co., and the cottage was stripped piece by piece of the furniture, to buy bread for the mother and daughter.

And yet Rupert Vail was as persistent as ever in his demand that Ethel should become his wife.

Then the cottage had to be sold, and it was Ezra Vail who secretly bought it.

To add to their misfortunes Mrs. Monte's health broke down, the money from the sale of the cottage was growing less each day, and in despair to see her mother suffer, Ethel said one day that she would marry Rupert Vail.

"Never! never! Let us die of starvation first, my child—yes, swear to me you will never become that man's wife!" cried the mother, excitedly, and to soothe her Ethel did as she was asked.

Then came the dying hours at last of the poor woman, the cruel threat of Ezra Vail to turn her out, though dying, the return of Mark Monte, as from the grave, and the contract he had signed, pledging himself to the man who thus made him his slave.

And all this time where was the handsome lover, Captain Malcolm Meredith, of the Sea Dove?

Not, as he had said he would, had he returned to Salem to make glad the heart of Ethel Monte.

One vessel from the whaling fleet had returned, and it had brought strange news, startling news, in fact, of the Sea Dove and her dashing young captain—news that sent a thrill of horror to the heart of Ethel Monte.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE JEWELLED MINIATURE.

HAD Captain Ezra Vail given to Mark Monte his own death-warrant to sign, at the time when he handed to him the "service paper," he would have readily signed it to get respite so as to go to his dying mother.

What the paper he did sign meant, he did not take time to think; but Ezra Vail knew, and all that it implied as well.

So the cruel landlord turned away, beckoning to his men to follow him, and the sister and brother were left alone.

"Is she conscious?" asked Mark, in a low voice.

"Yes; I will go and tell her that you are here—then you follow."

Ethel glided into the cottage, and there lay the dying woman.

For long years she had borne some secret sorrow, and what it was neither Mark nor Ethel knew.

Captain Monte also had seemed to suffer at times, and their children, even from childhood, had felt that some shadow hung over their parents' lives.

When her husband had died, Mrs. Monte had seemed to feel that all was left to her to bear; but her children were most devoted to her, and her years at least promised to pass in contentment if not in happiness.

Then came the departure of Mark, and his unknown fate, the loss of his wages, their only support, and the sale of what furniture could be spared for bread, and next the cottage.

As the money went so seemed Mrs. Monte to fail.

Ethel had noticed that her mother had often written letters, and had taken them to post herself; but no answers seemed to have ever come to them.

Then Mrs. Monte took to her bed, and she seemed to feel that the end was near.

"Ethel, somehow I cannot mourn our brother as dead, and I hope he may return for your sake, ere the end comes to me."

"There is something I have to say; but I will wait for Mark."

"If he does not come back, then at the last moment I will tell you."

"It will end your sufferings, for money at least Ethel."

"But not until the last moment will I speak, no, not until the icy touch of death I feel is upon my pulse to still its beating."

Thus had Mrs. Monte said, and one day, the one when Mark had returned, she had suddenly passed into a comatose state, and only at intervals started and recognized her daughter.

Two rooms only of the little cottage were now occupied, the others being bare of furniture.

A bed, an easy-chair, table and cot were in one room, and in the other a few culinary articles, a table, cupboard and two chairs.

Such had been the cottage furnishings reduced to by want, and the sales of the furniture had barely kept them from starving.

Upon the bed, still clean and comfortable, lay the dying woman, when Ethel entered and left her brother waiting without.

The eyes, sunken deep into the sockets, were closed, and the breath was hard and spasmodic.

"Mother!"

The eyes slowly opened at the call.

They roamed about the room and then rested upon the face of the maiden.

"Mother, do you know me?"

"Yes, my devoted Ethel," was the faint reply.

"Mother, you always said that you believed brother was not dead—that he would return."

"Yes! he has come!" said the dying woman with a start.

Ethel turned, and Mark, who had heard all, from where he stood on the porch by the open door, glided into the room and dropped upon one knee by the side of the bed.

The head of Mark Monte was bent until it rested upon the arm of the dying woman, and, in a voice that quivered he said:

"Mother, I am not dead, but am here by your side."

A sigh of relief and joy mingled came from the lips of the dying mother, and then she said, faintly:

"God bless you, Mark! I felt that you would come. I have something to tell you, Mark, a secret that I must not take into the grave with me, for your sake, and—"

The words had sunk almost into a whisper and then grew fainter and fainter until they died away.

The brother and sister waited, and soon Ethel said:

"Mark, she has gone to sleep."

The young sailor started, laid his head over the heart, and said, in a deep, quivering voice:

"Yes, Ethel, it is the sleep of death."

A moan broke from the girl's lips, and then she cried:

"No! no! no! it cannot be!"

The man was calm. What he had passed through had taught him perfect self-control.

He had come back from a cruel slavery, he had come home without a dollar in his pocket, to find the cottage sold, only a few pieces of furniture left in the bare rooms, and his mother dying.

She was dead now, and he and his sister were alone!

But he did not despair. He rose, folded the hands across the heart and said softly:

"She is at rest now, my sister. Come, sit out here on the porch until I return, for I must go and prepare for the burial."

He led her out upon the porch, and his calmness controlled her emotion.

"Brother, you said you had not a dollar in the world."

"Nor have I; but, surely, I can find some one to help me."

"Not unless you beg, and I could not do that, no, not that; but, Mark, there is one thing I cling to, for mother would not let it go—you remember her miniature, taken when she was a young girl, and how she said one day:

"Here, Ethel, is your mother when she was a young and happy girl. Take it, and never let other than yourself and Mark see it, unless it may be necessary to show it, some day."

"I remember it, Ethel, and wondered at her words then."

"Yes, and she had a secret to tell you; but it goes with her to the grave."

"So be it, Ethel; we must not complain."

"Oh no, and I am glad that she is free from her sufferings."

"Here, Mark, here is the case of the miniature likeness of our mother."

"See, it is of solid gold and set with precious stones, so must be of great value."

"The inner frame, see, is of gold, but we will keep that as it is; but this must go to bury her, Mark, and more, you must take what remains to buy your freedom from Ezra Vail, for you made yourself his slave by that paper you signed; I saw that by the triumphant, malignant look."

"His slave! My God! have I not had enough of slavery to break a giant's heart?" almost fiercely cried the young sailor.

"Tell me all to-night, brother, when we keep vigil together over our dead; now you must go. Here, take this with you, for it will buy all you need."

"Yes, many times," and thrusting the gold,

jewel-studded outer frame of the miniature into the inner pocket of his jacket, he kissed his sister tenderly and turned away.

Then he stopped and looked back, while he said hesitatingly:

"You do not fear to be alone, Ethel?"

"Fear to be alone with the casket that has held our mother's soul and heart, brother? Oh, no, I have no fear of anything."

And Mark Monte went on his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE JEWEL-STUDED MINIATURE.

In a shop in the part of Salem where sailors were wont to go, when they had anything to sell, a man sat in an easy-chair smoking his pipe.

About him were articles of all kinds, and from many lands.

Such a collection of curios as he had there three-score and ten years ago, would be a fortune to the possessor in this age of love of all things antique, odd and curious.

A mere pittance had he paid poor sailors for things that he would find a purchaser for who would pay him a hundred times what it had cost him.

And so it was that Hector Hume the junk dealer was a rich man, and getting richer, though no one suspected him of being more than ordinarily well off.

He was a man of fifty, with a thin, cunning face, and one that was a mask to his thoughts most thoroughly.

He dressed in deep black and might have been mistaken for an undertaker anywhere.

Family he had none, or if he did, no one knew of the fact, and he was his own clerk, for when business called him away from Salem, which was several days in each month, he padlocked his shop and those who wanted to sell to him, must await his return, for he had a monopoly of that line in the town.

"Well, young man, what is it?" he suddenly asked as a sailor entered his shop.

Then he took a second look at the visitor, and there was something about him which caused him to rise, lay aside his pipe and repeat his question, but in a different manner.

"How can I serve you, sir?"

"I have come to you, Mr. Hume, from having heard men say that one could borrow money from you on certain articles."

"I buy, sir, but seldom loan."

"Then I must go elsewhere."

"One minute, please, sir, for I said I seldom loan."

"I will not sell, but I will pay a good interest on a loan."

"What have you as collateral, sir?"

"This gold, jewel-studded frame," and Mark Monte placed the article named in the hand of Hector Hume.

"Ah! it looks as though it had been the frame of a miniature."

"It is the frame, sir, and for that reason I will not sell it, though the miniature is complete, in one sense of the word, without it."

"What do you consider it worth, sir?"

"That is what I wished to ask you."

The man examined it carefully and said indifferently:

"All of a hundred dollars, I should say."

"Mr. Hume, the gold in it alone is worth that, and more."

"Oh, yes, the gems," and the dealer examined the stones.

"Set as they are, I can only estimate upon their depth and weight, so would guess that they are worth fully three hundred dollars."

"Mr. Hume, you note the device, the small hand of a woman, formed of pearls, clasped by the large hand of a man, formed of diamonds, with the French motto in rubies: 'Le jour viendra.'"

"Now, there are, you see, twenty-three fine pearls, sixty-one diamonds, and they are pure and large ones, with seventy-five rubies in the French words."

"According to my indifferent knowledge of gems this frame is worth all of five thousand dollars."

"I had not examined it closely, sir, and I only took the idea that the gems were mostly chips, which are often used for such setting, looking just as well as though they were the full stone."

"I judge, however, that these are all deep and good stones, and if so, their value would not be far from your figure."

"What will you sell it for, sir?"

"At no price, for, as I said to you, I wish to borrow money, and I will pay a liberal interest for the loan, and in time redeem the collateral."

"I see; but how much do you wish?"

The young sailor thought for full a minute. He was penniless, and so was his sister.

His mother must be given a burial worthy of her, and the rent for the cottage must be paid back.

The cottage had been sold, Ethel had told him, for only seven hundred dollars, and it must be bought back and again furnished, for it was his sister's home.

Then Ethel must have a support until he could

get a place that would give them a good living, and it must not be a place before the mast.

Turning again to Hector Hume he said:

"I wish two thousand five hundred dollars, sir."

"You can have it, sir, on two per cent. interest per month, and six months in which to redeem it."

"I will pay the interest, sir, for I must have the money; but I am a sailor and take long voyages, and must have your written pledge not to sell that trinket two years from date."

"Call it one year, sir, and—"

"No, sir, two years, and no less."

Mr. Hector Hume was a man of strong will, and he generally had his way, with all who came to him; but there was something about Mark Monte that reversed the situation and he yielded.

"Very well, sir, call it two years."

"Give me your written guarantee, please."

"I never do such a thing as that, and—"

"Then I shall go elsewhere."

"No, I will do as you wish, but it is not business."

"It is justice at least, sir: but now let me employ half an hour, or so of your time."

"For what purpose?"

"I speak in confidence, sir."

"Certainly."

"My name is Mark Monte, and I sailed from G—two years and a half ago as a mate in Vail and Company's brig Dart."

"She was lost on the coast of Africa, and I have been for over two years a prisoner to the Arabs."

"I returned to-day to find my mother dying, and she is now dead; but my absence caused my sister to sell our little cottage, and Ezra Vail, who had come to Salem from G— to live, bought it for seven hundred dollars."

"I fear if I went to him he would refuse to sell it back, so I beg you to go and get it from him, yes if you have to pay much more."

"Will you do this for me, sir, and name the price of your services?"

"I will do it for you, sir, and make no charge."

"You have my sympathy, Mr. Monte; but will you call here for the money?"

"Yes, within the hour, for I go now to see about my mother's burial," and the young sailor left the shop of Hector Hume, who soon after closed his doors and set out upon his mission to see Ezra Vail.

CHAPTER XV.

HELD AGAINST HIM.

EZRA VAIL sat alone in his private office, when a visitor was announced.

He had been gloating over his triumph, in getting Mark Monte to sign the paper he had.

The return of the young sailor seemed to have been a very great surprise to him, and a painful one.

For some reasons best known to himself he was determined that Ethel Monte should become the wife of his son Rupert.

Was it because he had failed to win the mother, and he sought a certain revenge through the daughter?

It might have been; but the reason must have been a strong one to a man who loved gold as he did, to wish his son to wed a girl who was penniless.

And strangest of all Rupert Vail was just as anxious to make Ethel his wife, as his father was to have him do so.

"But for his return the girl would have consented, rather than have her mother moved out, when she was ill, for it's all nonsense about her dying, for she had not had a doctor to see her for days, as I know."

"Curse the boy! I thought he was at the bottom of the sea."

Just then Mr. Hume entered.

Mr. Hume was a man of few words and he knew the rich merchant, and was also known to him.

"Captain Vail, I desire to purchase a property which I am told you are the owner of."

"Well, sir, sit down and tell me which it is?"

"The Cliff Cottage, it is called."

"Ah, yes, but I can rent it at a fair price."

"Then you do not care to sell?"

"Yes, I am a business man, and I'll sell anything."

"What is it worth to you?"

"The property is yours, sir, so set your price, but remember, please, that you are a rich man, I but a poor junk-shop dealer."

"I've an idea you've got more money than folks give you credit for; but say twelve hundred."

"I'll give you nine hundred cash."

"I'll take it."

"Then draw up the papers, please."

The deed was drawn up, the money paid, and Hector Hume left the office.

As he returned to his shop, he found Mark Monte just coming there, and he said:

"The cottage is yours, Mr. Monte, and for one thousand dollars."

This was Hector Hume's little commission of one hundred dollars, and which was not to be known.

"Thank you, sir, I was afraid he would require more."

"Draw up the deed, please, in the name of my sister, Ethel Monte, and pay yourself out of the money you loan me."

This was done, and a shopman near called in as witness.

Then Mark took the fifteen hundred coming to him, got his guarantee from the shopman to give him two years in which to redeem the frame, and turned to go, when Hector Hume said:

"Your address, please, Mr. Monte, for it may be that I can put something in your way."

"Thank you, sir, I would be obliged if you would."

"Address simply to Salem," and Mark returned to the undertaker, paid his bill, then sought the grocery and ordered some provisions sent out to Cliff Cottage, after which he deposited eight hundred dollars in the bank in the name of his sister.

With the balance in his pocket, he sought the office of Ezra Vail.

The merchant and his son were there together, and they started at seeing him walk boldly into the room.

"How are you, Monte? Am glad to learn you escaped death in the wreck, for my father has just told me of your return," and Rupert Vail stepped toward the young sailor.

But Mark Monte did not take the proffered hand, and replied:

"I escaped, sir, and was the sole survivor."

"I aided Mate Selim, the Arab, whose arm was broken, to reach the shore, but he died soon after."

"I beg, Captain Vail, to offer you my written report of the loss of the brig, sir, which I had prepared for you," and he took from his pocket a neatly-written paper and handed it to the merchant, who replied:

"Humph! the brig is lost, but I got my insurance and care little for the facts of the case."

"I thought, sir, you might wish to know something of the brave men who lost their lives in your service."

"Come, I want no lecture from my inferiors, sir, and—"

"Ezra Vail, I came not here to quarrel with you, sir, but to give in my report of the brig's loss, and to know how much rent was due you on the cottage?"

"One year's rent."

"And the amount?"

"Two hundred dollars."

"Ah! rather large interest on an investment of seven hundred dollars; but there is your money, so give me a receipt and hand me back the paper your inhumanity forced me to sign."

"My inhumanity! Do you dare say that to my father?" cried Rupert Vail, fiercely.

"I dare say more, sir, for inhumanity does not suit the act he was guilty of in forcing a dying woman from her home."

"Dying? Bah! that was pretense, and—"

"Silence, sir, or I will throttle you!"

"My mother is dead!"

The two men, father and son, uttered cries of alarm at this and turned deadly pale.

They felt that they had gone too far.

"I am deeply distressed, Monte, to hear—"

"I wish none of your sympathy, sir, so do not force me to fling it back in your face with a curse."

"I want that paper, and a receipt for my money."

"That paper will cancel the debt, Mark Monte, when I call upon you to fulfill its purpose."

"You refuse?"

"I do."

The young sailor gazed at him as though he would spring upon him; but becoming calm in an instant he asked quietly:

"You refuse my money?"

"Yes, the paper is due on demand, so that settles it until I make the demand, and it cancels the debt when you do as you have agreed to do."

"Good-day, Mr. Monte."

The sailor turned on his heel and left the office, for that was no time to make trouble, even if he could see his way clear to force the merchant to give up the paper he had signed.

Returning to the cottage, he found a few kind-hearted people had dropped in, the coffin soon after came, and, declining the assistance of watchers, the brother and sister sat up themselves to keep the sad and lonely vigil by the side of their loved dead.

And, as they sat there through the long hours of the night, Mark Monte heard his sister's story of all the sorrow, bitterness and suffering they had known, and she, too, was told of the cruel captivity her brother had endured as the slave of an Arab master.

"I will see you comfortably settled here, Ethel, with some good soul to keep you company, and then I will see what I can do, and remember, there is to be no more poverty for you, my sweet sister, for ill-fortune certainly will not still pursue us as it has in the past."

The next day the body of Mrs. Monte was laid away in the churchyard, and the brother and sister returned to their desolate home, to plot and plan for the future.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER SUSPICION.

THERE was some talk, of course, about the death of Mrs. Monte, and people wished to know, only they were not informed of her serious illness, and all that; but all the while they knew, and were fully aware of how devoted Ethel had been to her dying mother.

Not being in the secret of the gem-studded frame of the miniature, with its queer device upon it, they supposed that Mark had brought money home with him, for they learned that he had bought the cottage back again, and much of the old furniture had been repurchased for an advance on what it had been sold for, while new had been paid cash for, and all sent out to the cottage.

The latter had been repainted and repaired, the fences put in perfect condition, and the grounds improved.

A good cow was bought, and an old couple, who wanted a home, were given quarters in the cottage to look after Ethel's comfort, and be a protection to her.

Mark was determined not to leave his sister destitute and suffering, and he had hopes that he could get a good position that would pay him well.

He went again to see Ezra Vail, in an endeavor to get the paper he had signed, but could do nothing with the obdurate old man, and, for fear of losing his temper, and getting into trouble, he departed without it.

Captain Vail had discovered that he had bought the cottage back, and it made him furious, and he called upon Hector Hume.

But that personage very quietly told him that he had heard Mark Monte intended to buy the property back at any price, and seeing a chance for himself to make a little money, he had at once made the purchase of Ezra Vail, and, smiling grimly, he asked:

"Now what is it your business, Captain Vail, so long as you have your money?"

As to the junk dealer and Mark having arranged the matter between them, Ezra Vail did not for a moment suspect; but he was intensely put out to see Ethel, who had seemed about driven to accept his son's offer, suddenly get out of his power by the return of her brother.

There was one thing that puzzled him greatly, and that was how Mark had gotten money.

He certainly had returned home penniless, or he would have paid the amount of the rent that day his mother died.

Then, a few hours after he had come to him with the year's rent, and following it, had bought back the cottage, and made it into a most cozy, perfect little home.

"Where did the money come from?" he had asked his son over and over again.

"He went to sea with only the sixty dollars we advanced him," Rupert Vail said.

"Yes, and came back looking utterly destitute."

"Now the brig was wrecked, and all were lost excepting himself."

"I know that Captain Hudson had some four thousand dollars on board, in the cabin locker, to buy the wines we wanted from Spain, France and the Madeiras, and I tell you that it looks suspicious, Rupert."

"It does, father; but if he had gotten anything, would it not have been taken from him when he was a prisoner to the Arabs?"

"Who knows that he was a prisoner?"

"True, we can only know that he says so."

"Yes, and I tell you I believe there is foul play in the whole affair."

"Get his report of the loss of the Dart."

The young man rose and took down a folio, in which Mark Monte's report had been filed away.

Captain Vail glanced it over to himself rapidly until he came to the following, which he read aloud:

"I counted all of the crew, from the bodies stretched along the beach, and yet, when Ayoub the Arab Rais made me go with him to search the dead, I could not find the body of Captain Hudson, so suppose that the surf had dragged it back into the sea again."

"You see, Rupert, that he says all were lost?"

"Yes, he being the sole survivor."

"And he comes home with money, when his report goes on to say:

"I escaped by taking a camel and flying by night to the coast."

"Was pursued by my Arab master and others, and seeing a vessel becalmed swam out to her."

"It was a British vessel, and I was taken to England, and there shipped before the mast in the ship Reindeer bound to Boston, for I had nothing but the clothes on my back and was penniless."

"Such is his report, Rupert, and you see, although he says he had nothing, he comes home and buys back his cottage, and the furniture his sister had sold."

"He also gets other furniture, paints and repairs the place and seems to have plenty of money."

"So it seems, father, and it looks suspicious."

"It does indeed, and we will use it against him."

"How can we?"

"I have a little plan, and you must carry it out," and telling his son to take a seat nearer to him the old sea-captain talked to him for fully half an hour in a low, earnest tone, and ended with the words:

"Now you see he is under suspicion, and we can force him and his sister to terms."

"We can," was the determined response of Rupert Vail.

CHAPTER XVII.

A CHARGE OF PIRACY.

THE rumors that were afloat about Captain Meredith, of the brig *Sea Dove*, were not of a very flattering kind, for it was said that a vessel answering to the description of his pretty craft, was cruising in the northern waters as a pirate.

Many vessels had been brought to, boarded and the whaling captains forced to hand over every dollar they had on board into the hands of this robber rover.

If he refused, his vessel was set on fire and the crew were set adrift in the boats, it was said.

Gold and valuables were the only booty he cared for, as cargoes he did not touch, so in other words he merely gathered toll on the high seas.

It was remembered that the *Sea Dove* had passed several wrecks in Salem Harbor, and that her young and handsome captain was a daily visitor at Cliff Cottage to see Ethel Monte.

People remembered also that he had boldly sprung overboard and saved the life of the beautiful girl, and it was looked upon by the gossips as a sure match between the young captain and Ethel Monte.

When therefore these ugly rumors came, as to the true character of Captain Meredith of the *Sea Dove*, people wondered what Ethel would do about it.

Of course Rupert Vail had known all about Malcolm Meredith, and in truth was aware that it was to him that Ethel was engaged, and when a vessel from the whaling fleet brought word that the *Sea Dove* was nothing more than a pirate, he gloated over it in secret, at the sorrow it would bring upon the girl, whom, after his fashion, he really loved, yet could not forgive for refusing the offer of his heart and hand.

In her honest way Ethel had told her brother all that had passed between Malcolm Meredith and herself, and the young sailor felt most kindly to the lover of his sister for having saved her life.

He had been a month at home, the cottage had been put in perfect trim, and, while there was a snug sum in bank for Ethel's use, he had a few hundreds left for himself, and intended to start away in a few days to once more begin to carve out his fortune.

Then he heard the rumor regarding the *Sea Dove*, and he could not but tell them to Ethel.

"It is false, brother for he is not what they say he is, I am sure."

"It is the work of Rupert Vail, this rumor, I verily believe," she said indignantly.

"Well, Ethel, I trust you, and should Meredith visit you again, I know that you will know just what to do," and worried at the reports, in spite of himself, Mark lighted his pipe and went for a stroll alone along the beach.

He had not gone far and was just seeking a favorite seat under the cliff, when he heard his name called.

"It is Rupert Vail; now what can he want?" he muttered; but he arose politely as Rupert Vail advanced.

"Monte, I have come to have a talk with you," said the young merchant in an embarrassed way.

"Well, sir, what is it about?"

"Sit down and let us understand each other, for I mean you well."

Mark smiled, and Vail continued:

"Now I wish to be friendly with you, and not have your enmity, while I desire to help you."

"Mr. Vail, I am utterly indifferent, sir, to your friendship or your hatred," was the cool reply.

"There, you are getting angry and without cause; but you must hear what I have to say?"

"I am all attention, Mr. Vail."

"I know just how you have been situated for years past, and that your family are one of the best in America, only you have met with misfortune after misfortune."

"You came home under the saddest circumstances, and my hot-headed old father has given you no reason to like me or my name."

"But, Monte, I confess to you that I love your sister dearly, and I have asked her to be my wife."

"And she has refused?"

"Yes, but if you would ask her to marry me I am sure that she would consent."

"My sister, sir, is engaged to another; but were it not so, I would rather place her by the side of her mother up yonder in the cemetery, than see her your wife."

"Pardon me for being thus plain, but you

sought me out and I am a frank man, Rupert Vail, and not the one who is afraid to let a secret foe know just what I think of him."

"Your father robbed my father of his fortune, and, though I can prove this, there are certain technicalities that keep me from sending Ezra Vail to prison."

"You pretend to love my sister, and yet I believe you have hated me and mine, you and your father also, with all the venom in your nature, and that is saying a great deal."

"No, Mr. Vail, our paths have different ways in life, and I only hope you will not cross mine too often."

This was said in a low, earnest tone, and not excitedly, so that it was felt the more.

It caused Rupert Vail to turn livid, and he answered savagely:

"So you refuse my offer, when I could give your sister wealth, and place you in command of the finest clipper-ship afloat?"

"I am not to be bought, sir, and you have my answer."

"And you intend to let your sister become the wife of a pirate?"

"How dare you make that accusation, sir, against Captain Meredith?"

"It is true."

"It is false."

"Very well, a few days will show, for the vessel that arrived last night brought news from the whaling fleet, and they are bringing this lover of your sister, this gallant Captain Malcolm Meredith home in irons as a pirate."

It was Mark's time to start now, and his face paled at the words he heard.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ARREST.

AN instant did Mark Monte stand in silence, and his thoughts were cruelly bitter, though his face did not show the emotion he felt.

He had suffered so much that he had become master of all outward emotion, young as he was.

Could it be that another bitter blow was to fall upon them, that the daring lover of his sister, and whom he knew she devotedly loved, was to be proven after all a free rover?

The thought was torture to his soul.

Turning upon Rupert Vail, who was enjoying his situation immensely, he said:

"Is this a lie, sir, trumped up to hurt my sister to the heart, or do you, on your honor as a man, say that it is true?"

"It is true, and I am not, knowing it to be so, surprised that you permit your sister to be engaged to a pirate."

"Rupert Vail, what do you mean?"

"I mean that you are not a whit better than Meredith, for I accuse you, Mark Monte, of having wrecked the brig *Dart* to rob her, and the money you got by your hellish deed, you brought home with you, and are now living upon— Hands off, Mark Monte!"

The cry came too late, for Mark Monte was upon him, his hands upon the throat of his accuser.

Rupert Vail had been noted for his strength; but, in the hands of Mark Monte he was as a child. The young sailor's muscles were as of steel, and his endurance marvelous.

He seemed for a moment as though he meant to kill the man in his terrible grip, for with his left hand Mark drew his sheath-knife.

Seeing this there broke forth the piteous, pleading cry:

"Mercy, Mark Monte, don't kill me, for God's sake."

"Bah! I am a fool—go!"

He threw him from him as he spoke, and strode away without once looking behind him.

Rupert fell backward with great force, his head struck the jagged end of a rock, the blow rendering him insensible, for he lay like one dead.

Not having looked back, Mark turned a bend in the beach, and saw not the disaster he had brought upon his enemy.

The rock cut the scalp to the skull, and the bleeding revived Vail after a while, and he arose and staggered to his feet.

The sun had set, and he shivered, as though cold.

He put his hand to his head, as though his mind was clouded, and then, with a fearful oath, strode away toward the town.

In the mean time Mark Monte had returned to the cottage.

His sister saw him come in, and joined him in his room.

"Brother, has aught troubled you?" she asked, for he had always come home with a pleasant "hail" to her, as he called his way of greeting his sister, which was, "Ethel ahoy!" or, "Ahoy, my pretty clipper!"

"Ethel, I just came from a walk along the beach, and saw Rupert Vail."

"Indeed! that means more trouble."

"I fear so, for he asked me to urge you to marry him, and I told him very frankly what I thought of such a request from him."

"Then he said that the man you love was a pirate."

"Ah, yes, they have had that rumor going around for some time, as you know, brother."

"True; but Vail makes the direct assertion that the fleet is on the way home, and Meredith is on board, a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" and the face of the maiden paled.

"Yes, my poor child, under the charge of piracy."

"It is false!"

"So I told him; but he makes the assertion upon his honor."

"His honor!"

"Very true, it is a frail substance to base anything good on; but it may be true that they have Meredith a prisoner, and upon the charge of piracy; but can it be proven, is another thing?"

"It can never be proven against him, for he is not a man to be a criminal."

"I hope it will turn out so, and I really believe it will, from what you have told me of him; but there was another charge that Rupert Vail made."

"Still another?" and there was a sneer in the voice of Ethel.

"Yes, and this time against me."

"Against you, brother?"

"True; for he accused me of wrecking the *Dart*, robbing her, and of now living on my stolen plunder."

"Oh, Mark!"

It was all that Ethel could say in her indignation, and her brother continued:

"I lost control of myself, seized him by the throat, and for the moment the devil tempted me to drive my knife to his heart."

"But I thought better of it, fortunately, and throwing him from me, came back to the cottage."

"Brother Mark, are we doomed ever to suffer as we have the past few years?"

"Is there a curse upon us that our lives are filled with such bitterness and suffering?"

"It is hard, very hard, sister mine; but the end is not yet."

As he spoke there came a rap at the door, and the next moment a man entered whom both Mark and Ethel well knew.

His face was serious, and behind him came two others.

"Oh, Mark! what do these officers of the law want?" gasped Ethel, clinging to her brother's strong arm for support, as she recognized the town constable and his assistants.

She was not left long in doubt, for the deep voice of the constable was heard in response:

"It means that I arrest you, Mark Monte, for mutiny and murder upon the high seas!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE RED DOVE.

THE whaling fleet out of Salem was scattered over many leagues of the blue ocean, gathering in fortunes for the owners of the five vessels.

Like a flock of huge birds, looked the fleet as it dotted the waters, taking in sail and laying to for the night, like gulls going to roost until the coming of another dawn.

A grand fleet it was, the "Sea Wings of Salem," as the splendid craft was called.

They had wended their way over the trackless deep to the home of their prey, and the hearts of the crews were joyous in anticipation.

There were five majestic vessels flying the merchant flag of Ezra Vail & Co., and as many more belonging to another firm.

Then there was one here with another flag, and so on until some half a hundred grand vessels floated the waters, from one mile to a league apart.

Darkness was coming on, and the morrow was to be a day of rest, for the Sabbath was kept by all in the whaling fleet.

A calm had come on, the sea was smooth as a pond, and across the waters floated the sound of violin and flute, the low notes of a guitar, and manly voices raised in song.

Now and then the ship's bells would strike the hour, and the silvery ring would run from craft to craft until each one of the fleet had told the time, and merry music it made too.

As the last notes of two bells died away, telling that it was nine o'clock, the sailors went to their bunks, and, excepting the regular lights of the vessels, and a stray ray coming from a captain's cabin, all lights were out in the fleet.

Then a faint ripple came over the waters, and, coming along with it was a craft unlike any other in the fleet.

It was a large brig, graceful, stately and sailing along like a witch of the waves.

She ran down near the outermost vessel of the fleet and lay to not a cable's length away.

Not a block creaked, not a chair rattled on board, nor had a sound been heard from the strange craft, until there came the boat from her, close under the quarter of the nearest whaler.

"Ahoy, the barque! What vessel is that?" called out a deep voice in the boat.

"The Niagara, whaler, out of Salem," was the response of the sleepy officer of the deck.

"Ay, ay, I am from the dispatch brig, Red Dove, and wish to see your captain."

"Come alongside, sir. Captain Jubal, an officer with dispatches, sir," called out the mate,

the latter being shouted down the companion-way.

The dispatch officer boarded, saluted the man on deck pleasantly, and went down into the cabin.

Captain Jubal was seated at his table enjoying a hot grog, and already felt the strength of the spiced decoction, so knew better than to attempt to rise.

"Glad to see you, cap'n! Name, please?"

"Meredith, sir, of dispatch brig Red Dove, Captain Jubal. Hope you are well, sir," was the pleasant response.

"Hearty, thank you; help yourself! There's plenty more in the jug. Where from, mate? and what's news in old Salem?"

"Everything goes well there, captain. Your health, sir," and the visitor dashed off a glass of grog.

Captain Jubal's eyes, rapidly dimming under the influence of sundry mugs of the hot spiced rum, saw before him a very attractive person in the commander of the dispatch brig, Red Dove.

He was as pleasant-faced as a boy, and looked the perfect sailor from head to foot.

He dressed in a very stylish manner, and yet appeared to be a man to depend upon, if one could judge from his daring, resolute face.

"Captain, your ship is one of the six belonging to the firm of Ezra Vail & Co., I believe, for I see here the names, full rigger, Ontario; barques, Niagara, Erie and Michigan, and brigs, Ezra Vail and Rupert Vail."

"Yes, sir, that's the Vail fleet."

"Will you please let me give you this roll of papers, and also this letter, which explains itself, and I am sorry the mail did not arrive before I sailed."

The old skipper took the papers, and then read the letter:

"This says I am to pay you five hundred dollars out of money I have on hand, and same to be credited to my account on return."

"Yes, Captain Jubal."

"What in thunder is he drawin' on me for money for?"

"The letter states that it is to be devoted to a special use, as my brig is bound on a particular cruise, and I also draw on the other captains."

"I see; I suppose I'll have to do it."

It was evident that Captain Jubal did not like to part with money in hand, but he paid it; the captain of the Red Dove took his leave, and ten minutes after was on board of another vessel of the fleet on the same mission.

When the sun rose over the waters, Captain Meredith's brig, Red Dove, was seven leagues away from the barque Niagara, and the handsome young officer was breakfasting with the captain of the last vessel in the fleet which he had visited.

His beautiful brig had glided from vessel to vessel, under cover of the night; the captains had been roused from their bunks, for few of them were up, and a letter handed to each one, making a demand from their various owners of a certain sum of money, for "a special service," on which the Red Dove was to be sent.

In each case it had been a stated sum, and Captain Meredith had in his boat in waiting, a very handsome sum in gold, when he bade the commander of the last vessel he had visited farewell, thanked him for his hospitality, and was rowed to his own trim craft.

"Set full sail, and head southward," he ordered, pleasantly, as he returned his officer's salute, and went to the cabin, followed by two men bearing the gold he had collected.

The men placed it upon the table and left the cabin. Captain Meredith glanced over the tags on the various bags, saw the names and the amounts, and counting it all up rapidly, said:

"Twenty thousand dollars! Certainly a good night's work. What fools men are," and with a hearty laugh the commander of the Red Dove threw himself into an easy-chair, and, lighting a pipe, resigned himself to seemingly cheerful meditation, again musing aloud:

"Twenty thousand dollars, and not a drop of blood spilled to get it!

"Ha! ha! ha! won't those worthy skippers swear when they learn the truth?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" and the ripple of the waters, as the brig sped swiftly along, mingled musically with the captain's laughter.

CHAPTER XX.

STARTLING INFORMATION.

SEVERAL months passed away, and the whaling fleet was prospering.

A number of fine catches had been made by each vessel, and there was every prospect that the vessels would be homeward bound with full cargoes long before the time they had expected they would spread their sails toward Salem.

Of course the fleet, in its working, had gotten widely separated, but they all had a certain latitude and longitude as a rendezvous, and when cruising near it were wont to lay over on a Sabbath now and then, to give the crews a chance to visit each other and talk of home.

One of the furthest of the vessels to the westward happened to be the Niagara, barque, Ezra

Vail & Co., Captain Ike Jubal, commander, the first one of the fleet, it will be remembered, that had been visited by Captain Meredith of the Red Dove on an occasion which had seemed to furnish much merriment for the young commander.

The captain was on the quarter-deck of his vessel, watching the coming of a very handsome brig toward him.

The boats were out after a "spouter," and there were few of the crew on board.

"That's the same craft, cap'n, as visited us, sir, four months or five ago," said a quarter-master standing near.

"The dispatch brig?"

"Yes, sir, as well as I could see her, for it was night then; but there can't be many brigs afloat as pretty as that one is, so it must be the same one."

"She's a beauty, Hallowell, that's certain, and she's running down to speak us."

This proved to be a fact, for the brig came flying along at a wonderful speed, for the light wind blowing, and soon luffed up under the lee of the barque.

"Ho the Niagara, ahoy!" called out a manly voice.

"Ahoy the dispatch brig!" answered Captain Ike Jubal.

"I desire to board you, Captain Jubal."

"Ay, ay, sir, you are welcome."

A boat was lowered from the brig, and a few moments after Captain Meredith was in the large and comfortable cabin of the whaler.

A bottle of rum was on the table, with a couple of glasses, some pipes and tobacco, and the skipper was listening to the very entertaining conversation of the brig's commander, and hoping to learn what had been the "special service" he had gone on.

After a second glass of grog it came round to it in this way.

"Now, captain," said the brig's commander, "I feel that I can place a certain amount of confidence in you, and tell you that I need a little more, just a little more pecuniary aid from you."

"The truth is, I am on a special mission, in which every owner in the fleet, and every captain is interested."

"The owners are paying, or I should say, risking the money, but are taking it out of the supplies advanced the captains when they sailed; but it goes to the good of all, the fleet skippers really risking nothing, but benefiting largely in the end."

"I cannot betray confidence wholly, but I may hint that there is a certain number of vessels that have been secured at a small price, and are being fitted out to—but I must be careful, I see, or I will betray confidence."

"The truth is, I need more money from the fleet captains, and your share will be only a couple of hundred to make up the amount."

"I have no order for this, but I can give you my personal receipt, and explain away the matter when I return to Salem."

"Of course it will be satisfactory to you?"

Of course it was, for the idea of being interested in some secret transaction out of which he was to make money, by advancing his owner's and not his own cash, pleased the old whaler, and the cunning captain of the brig somehow made him feel that he had let him into a great secret; but, after he had paid the money, gotten his receipt and sailed away, all he knew about the "special service secret," was two receipts he held, signed:

"MEREDITH,

Captain of Dispatch Brig, Red Dove."

A month after, all of the fleet happened to be in the neighborhood of the latitude and longitude rendezvous, and the result of it was that they laid over for a Sabbath, and the captains visited each other and compared notes:

The result was the discovery that each captain was out from three to seven hundred dollars of their owner's money, and held in lieu thereof the receipts of the handsome captain of the Red Dove; but none of them knew aught about that "special service," and, if any one was at all suspicious that all was not as it should be, he kept it to himself.

Time passed on, and the time was not far away when the fleet would be homeward bound with a full cargo.

One day a vessel arrived with letters and supplies from home, and the men of the fleet were happy in hearing of their loved ones.

But the captain of the supply vessel knew nothing whatever about this "special service" brig.

He had not been let into the secret of Captain Meredith's recent mission, that was certain; but he sprung to his feet like one in a fit, when he heard the name of the brig spoken by one of the captains, for all were on board the supply vessel enjoying a Thanksgiving-day dinner.

"The Red Dove! The Red Dove?" yelled the excited captain.

"Yes, cap'n, and what ails yer?"

"Are you excited because you never heard tell on that Scriptu'al brig bein' red afore?" asked captain Jubal.

"A brig?"

"Yes, and a beauty."

"She carries at the fore a blue flag with a red dove in it?"

"Yes," came in a chorus. "Her captain is a handsome young fellow, with a laughing face, brightest kind of eyes, and a voice that is deep-toned and musical."

"You have named him, Captain Skinner," Captain Jubal said, and he began to feel a trifle nervous at the manner of Skipper Skinner.

"Gentlemen, you have been robbed."

"The Red Dove is a pirate, and her young captain the cleverest and most daring free rover afloat."

A chorus of groans went up from the assembled whaler captains, as Skipper Skinner resumed his seat, and for a "bracer," over a gallon of grog went gurgling down half a hundred throats, for the crooking of elbows was as instantaneous as though executed by command.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED DOVE HAS TALONS.

EVERY captain was most anxious to hear how Skipper Skinner knew that the Red Dove was a buccaneer brig.

They groaned inwardly, and each one, had he not been also taken in would have been glad to ridicule his fellows.

But there was no exception, the captain of the Red Dove had been impartial and had not slighted a single vessel of the fleet.

"I know it from experience, mates," said Captain Rube Skinner on being asked for information as to how he had gained his knowledge of the Red Dove.

All wished to know just what that experience was, and so Skipper Skinner dashed off a glass of grog, lighted his pipe and said:

"It was just two weeks ago that I discovered a sail astern of the Winged Whale."

"We hadn't passed any vessel, and as the brig was a good one—well you all know what the Winged Whale can do, gents, for if she has anything in this fleet to beat her, I've yet to learn the name of her."

As there was a dead silence it went without saying that Captain Rube Skinner had the fleetest vessel in the whaling fleet.

So he continued, after waiting for a minute for some one to contradict him.

"As I was saying, mates, I couldn't understand that craft being astern of us, and heading as we was."

"I gave a squint through my glass, and I soon seen she was a brig, and more, that she was walking up on us."

"I looked at the Whale to see if all was drawing right."

"There was nothing to find fault about, only more cloth might be spread, and so I put it upon her."

"The result was that the craft astern still crawled up on us, and when she also set more canvas she just came humping along at a pace that made me feel uneasy."

"I called the whole crew to their posts, put every bit of clothing the Winged Whale had, on her, as if she was dressed in her best for a Sunday, and then noted the result."

"Durn me ef the pursuer wasn't still gaining, and in great shape."

"I noticed that she carried no bone in her teeth, but cut through the waves silent like, and stood up to the stiff breeze a great deal straighter than we did."

Then I saw that her masts were uncommon tall, and her topmasts was a surprise, so high did they run up."

"There was not a sail that wasn't flat as a board, and not a rope amiss."

"She was just perfect, and she came through the waters, never swerving a quarter point, at a speed that I didn't believe possible."

"She did not appear to be armed, and I could not see over a dozen men on her decks; but I searched her well, and at the fore I saw her blue flag with a red dove in it."

"And at her peak?" asked Captain Jubal, anxiously.

"She carried a black field with a great round globe in it, which showed up to be the world I afterward discovered."

"She fired no shot, did not signal, and only when her sharp and tremendous long bowsprit was running its needle-like point almost into the spokes of my wheel, did she hail."

"The hail came from her quarter-deck, too, and, as though wishing to show she could pass me to leeward, she fell off a point and crept up nearer."

"And the hail?" asked Captain Jubal, while all waited in breathless silence.

"It came out sharp with:

"Winged Whale, ahoy!"

"Ahoy," I answered, and in no good humor to see my craft dead beat that way."

"I have orders for you, Captain Skinner, so come to, and I will board you."

"As he knew my craft and me, I did as he told me, thinking he had come out of Salem after I did, and knowing he could do it the way he sailed."

"Then he came on board, and he was the man I described."

"He was that polite I thought he must have

been a Frenchman, and he said almost sweet-like:

"You are going to the whaling fleet, of which Captain Jubal is acting merchant commodore, with his barque, the Niagara, for flagship?"

"Of course I said yes, and then he remarked in the same sweet way:

"You are to report that a number of other vessels, in ballast, and with only manning crews are coming to meet the fleet, and all men who wished to ship on them and return to the fishing grounds for two years longer, can do so, and you are to pay them off?"

"I was sure now he had orders for me; but he continued:

"You have on board a supercargo who is to pay off such men as re-ship, and the amount of gold you have with you is about fifteen thousand dollars, is it not?"

"About that, sir; the supercargo knows," I replied.

"Well, Captain Skinner, my brig sails best with gold ballast, so you will just turn that money over to me!"

"His voice was just as pleasant, but he pointed a pistol at me, and when I sprung up and seized a cutlass from the transom, why he just disarmed me with an ease that surprised me, and his voice rung out:

"Red Doves, show your talons!"

"Mates, there were half a hundred men on that brig, and it was no use, so I gave him the money, and, still smiling politely, he bade me good-by.

"Now, who says he ain't a pirate?"

Not a voice answered the momentous question.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN AMBUSH AT SEA.

UPON the principle that misery loves company," the captains of the whalers were rather pleased that Captain Rube Skinner had not escaped the very marked and unfortunate attention of Captain Meredith of the fleet-sailing Red Dove.

There was no one among the company of skippers to crow over his being an exception, so all looked askance, and then counted up their losses.

Captain Skinner admitted that the pirate had fleeced him out of some fifteen thousand dollars, and the fleet skippers figured out about twenty thousand on the first visit of the very cunning commander of the Red Dove, and about seven thousand on his second coming.

"Something over forty thousand out of the fleet—not a bad cruise for him by any means," said one.

"Here's that we catch and hang him," Captain Skinner said, and the bumper was drank with a cheer.

The next day the Winged Whale started on her run back to Salem, to make report that the fleet had been more successful than ever before, and would start on the home voyage soon, loaded down with the result of the voyage.

What else he had to report he knew would take off the profits in a measure, especially where an owner had but one vessel with the fleet.

At last the whalers started homeward, and the fleet became strung out in a long line, according to the respective speed of the vessels.

A severe storm struck them after a few days, and two of Ezra Vail Company's vessels sprung a leak, which so gained upon them that they had to signal for help.

Captain Jubal bore down for them, and, after inspection discovered that neither of the vessels could hold out for the cruise.

So the transfer of all the cargo that could be gotten off had to be made, and the Niagara held on her way with the crews of the two vessels added to her own on board.

Hardly had she gotten well on her way, leaving the two sinking craft to their fate, when the lookout in the foretop sung out:

"Sail, ho!"

"Whereaway?" called out Captain Jubal, who was on deck.

"Dead ahead, sir," was the response, and soon after was added:

"She is heading toward us, sir."

Then half an hour passed, and the lookout thrilled all on board with the cry:

"It's the pirate brig, sir—the Red Dove!"

Captain Jubal looked positively wicked, and calling to the two captains of the deserted vessels to follow him, he went into his cabin.

They were there for some time, and when they came out the stranger crews were sent below, along with a dozen of the men of the Niagara.*

The ship was a splendid sailer, and large as she was, she was leading the entire fleet, not another vessel being even in sight astern.

The look on Captain Jubal's face was now as cunning as the expression of a fox.

He had decided to play a little game upon the pirate, should he board him.

It was not long before he got the opportunity to try, for the brig was now very near, and coming on in splendid style.

She showed no armament on her decks, and

only a score of men were visible; but then at the fore was seen the blue flag with the red dove in the center, and at the peak now went up a flag with a black field and the globe, representing the earth.

The Niagara had two small guns, and they had been quickly loaded, while the crew above and below decks had been armed with cutlasses and pistols.

Running to windward of the Niagara, as she came near, the brig's commander's voice was heard in trumpet tones:

"Ho the Niagara!"

"Ahoy the Red Dove!" thundered Captain Jubal.

"I will put about, overhaul you and board while still under way, for I have news for you."

"And I've got news for you," muttered Captain Jubal; but aloud he shouted:

"Ay, ay, sir, glad to see you."

The Red Dove went by like an arrow, swept around in the wake of the ship, as though on a pivot, and, handled in such a masterly manner that she won the admiration of all the whalers, she was in chase of the Niagara before she had gotten three lengths away almost.

Captain Jubal believed in carrying sail, and so his ship was crowded from deck to truck; but in spite of her vast spread of canvas and her great speed, the brig overhauled her rapidly, and, still handled in superb style, the sharp bows were brought close alongside of the poop-deck of the ship.

Then Captain Meredith was seen to come forward, spring into the fore-shrouds, and, with a splendid leap, he alighted gracefully upon the deck of the whaler.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SEA TARTAR.

CAPTAIN ISAAC JUBAL had not stepped forward to meet his distinguished guest, who had leaped upon his deck from the pretty brig, Red Dove, a moment too soon, for, almost as his feet touched the ship, the daring young captain's keen eyes told him he had made a sad mistake.

"I am glad to see you, cap'n, glad indeed," cried the whaler commodore, grasping the hand of the young commander in a vise-like grip that was meant to hold him fast, while at the same instant one of the captains of the sunken whalers caught hold of his other hand.

But the eyes of Captain Meredith had taken in the situation, as I have said, by the time his feet had touched the deck, for he beheld two-score of armed men crouching along the high bulwarks, the heads of others pouring up out of the hold amidships and forward, and in the cabin were still more.

He saw that he was entrapped, but not for an instant did he lose his presence of mind.

One look over his shoulder showed him that to spring back upon the brig was impossible, for she had already luffed sharply, and was widening the space between her and the ship as she still forged ahead, and at the same time out-pointed the whaler.

But he knew not what resources the whaler had, that were not visible, and the brig must not be taken.

Quick as a flash he made up his mind.

He would leap over the stern into the sea, the ship would forge ahead, his brig put about rapidly, and, before the large vessel could lay to, he would be picked up and the Red Dove would fly away out of harm's way to leeward.

A second only did it take him to make up his mind, and how it happened neither the whaler-commodore, nor Captain Abe Handy could explain; but one was sent flying in one direction, the other went sprawling upon the deck ten feet away, knocking over the other captain and using him as a cushion to break his fall.

Then, with a leap, the pirate meant to reach the bulwarks and spring over into the sea; but his foot slipped and he fell to his knees.

"Catch him! Kill him!" yelled Captain Jubal, and half a dozen seamen threw themselves upon him, bearing him to the deck by sheer force of numbers.

"Hands off! I surrender," he cried, and the men formed a circle around him, just as the whaler-commodore advanced, white with rage at his trouble, for a man of gigantic dignity was Isaac Jubal, and not one of his crew had ever seen him move more rapidly.

"Blast you, sir, I've a notion to—"

He paused as the tall form of the prisoner confronted him, his arms folded upon his broad breast, his face calm, even smiling.

"Hang me?" said Captain Meredith, filling in the sentence.

"Yes, hang you, and every man on your accursed pirate craft."

"It's catching before hanging, commodore; you have me, but my men—see!"

He pointed to the brig, which had gone about and was flying away with all speed, as though expecting a broadside.

"Fire on her!" yelled Captain Jubal, and, a minute after, one of his twelve-pounders sent a shot flying after the brig.

A second shot was fired, but, like the first, flew wild.

"It is easier to harpoon whales, Commodore Jubal, than it is to wound the Red Dove when

she is on the wing," said the captain of the brig, smilingly.

This drew the attention of the whaler commodore once more to him, and he fairly howled:

"Put this man in irons!"

"But, sir, I beg you to spare me this indignity."

"Silence! or I will hang you to the yard-arm!"

"And for what crime?"

"Piracy."

"My dear commodore, you are surely deranged. Your grog has given out, or something has turned your brain, that you make such a charge against me."

"Do you deny it?"

"That I am a pirate?"

"Yes—do you deny it?"

"Why, certainly; and I would know why you make such a charge against me?"

"Because I know you to be a red-handed buccaneer."

"Worse and worse; but your proof, commodore, your proof."

"You boarded the messenger brig Winged Whale, and robbed her captain of fifteen thousand dollars, and you got out of the captains of the fleet a snug sum of gold from a trumped-up story and forged papers which you showed us. Is not that piracy on the high seas?"

"It may be so considered, if you prove that I am guilty of your charges. As I cannot escape, I beg you not to put me in irons, but that you will treat me with the respect due my rank."

"The deuce take your rank, sir! Into irons you go," was the angry reply.

Captain Meredith made no reply, glanced toward his rapidly-flying schooner, and then took a look around the horizon.

"Your lookout has weak eyes, commodore, for yonder is a sail he has not reported," and he pointed astern.

"Sail ho!" came from aloft at the same instant.

"Yes, it is one of our fleet overhauling us since we have been fooling with you."

The prisoner smiled, and held out his hands for the irons with the air of a man who made the best of a bad situation.

"Now take him below, and signal the fleet to keep close company until morning, for I shall shorten sail to allow them to come up," said the whaler commodore.

When night settled upon the sea, a dozen of the whaling fleet were in sight, coming up astern of the Niagara, and wondering what was the matter on board the flagship.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BEFORE HIS JUDGES.

AFTER the whaler commodore got over his anger, he felt that he could afford to be merciful with his prisoner.

At heart he was a good man, was Captain Isaac Jubal, and he felt sorry for a man who was destined to be hanged, even for piracy.

There was certainly no chance for the prisoner to escape, below decks was anything but comfortable and savory, and the outlaw seemed to have been reared in refinement, and to have been a gentleman, whatever he might since then have degenerated into.

So, after a few hours in irons, Captain Jubal did just what his men knew he would do, sent down and ordered his prisoner released of his irons and brought on deck.

"It hain't pleasant below, and yer hands look pretty delicate for irons," he said, as an excuse for his kind-heartedness.

Captain Meredith's face lost its cynical smile instantly, and he said frankly:

"I thank you, sir; you are very kind to me, and I appreciate it."

"Since I recall it, your hands hain't so durned delicate as they look," grimly said the old captain, and he feelingly passed his hand over a lump on his forehead, which had been raised by coming in contact with his prisoner's fist.

"One's hands must harden who leads the life I do; yes, and his heart, too," the prisoner added with a sad smile.

It was the smile that touched the old commodore, for it was so full of sadness, so different from the reckless smile the young sailor had always worn.

"I'm sorry you are a pirate, young man, and now that you have got to hang, I guess you are sorry, too; but I'll treat you kindly while you are with me, for I can afford to, seeing that I have caught you."

"Yes, and I was cleverly caught, too."

"Then you admit to being a pirate?"

"Oh, no, I admit nothing, deny nothing."

"Hang me if you can prove me to be a pirate," was the reckless response.

The ships of the fleet were now coming into sight quite rapidly, one three leagues to windward, another as many to leeward, others astern, and several just visible, all holding the same course.

Thus they stood when night came on, and signal lanterns were kept upon the flag-ship, telling all to keep together in squadron, and also signaling to the other ships to notify those unseen from the decks of the Niagara.

The prisoner was invited to the captain's

*The whalers always carried very large crews.
—THE AUTHOR.

table to supper, and the three jolly old sea-dogs regarded him with a vast deal of interest, both the "commodore" and his brother officers having forgiven him the fall he gave them.

When the grog began to circulate freely, the whaler commodore, glancing at the handsome, daring face of the young sailor, asked:

"What on earth ever made you turn pirate, cap'n?"

"See here, commodore, I'll spin a yarn for you, drink your grog, tell your fortunes out of the wreaths of spiral smoke that go upward from my pipe, and sing a song for you; but I will not talk of myself or my past; but, if you wish to talk about my being hanged for piracy, I'll even discuss that with you."

He smiled as he spoke, the commodore remained silent, and soon after the prisoner broke forth in a song, his splendid voice gathering the crew aft to hear him.

"Waal, ef he hain't ther durnedest most unconsarnedest man I ever see for one as has a rope around his neck, may I never see Salem," muttered the boatswain, and he but expressed the opinion of all.

The young pirate told a good story, as well as sung in a way to draw tears to the eyes of his enemies, and when Captain Jubal sprung a yarn the merry laugh of the man who was under the shadow of the yard-arm, made the hearts of the seamen turn cold.

There was no mockery in his laughter, it seemed to come from the very fount of merriment.

It was late when the strange party in the whaler's cabin broke up, the prisoner to go to bed, the others to go on deck and discuss the remarkable man.

When the sun rose the wind was blowing a six knots, there were some thirty sail in sight, all regulating their speed to meet that of the flag ship, and the day promised to be a pleasant one.

The prisoner appeared at breakfast, ate heartily and was as light-hearted as ever.

When eight bells struck at noon, sail were counted and all the fleet except three or four reported within signaling distance.

Sail was shortened on the Niagara, and the fleet was signaled to come as near as possible.

When this was done the covey of white-winged vessels lay to and boats left the sides of the various craft and headed for the flag ship.

The whaler commodore stood on deck, dressed in his best, to receive the skippers, and conscious that he had a surprise to spring upon them that would lay them all aback.

The awning had been spread on deck, and here they had all assembled, when Commodore Jubal opened his broadside with the remark:

"Gents, yesterday I was run afoul by a pirate craft which you have all heard of under the name of the Red Dove."

"Having had two of the fleet go down, I had their crews on my vessel, and so determined to surprise the pirate captain, who invited himself on board."

"We did surprise him, for he is now in my cabin, and I'll say of him that a likelier gentleman never cut a throat or scuttled an honest craft."

"I am sorry his brig escaped; but he is here, and I called you together to present him to your notice and to have you decide whether he is to swing now to the yard-arm, or we are to carry him into Salem to be hanged."

"The question is before you, gents; you heard Captain Skinner's report of his piracy, and you know that every skipper among us is out of pocket through him, and he hasn't likely got his purse on board with him so he can pay us back and have that much in his favor."

"Gents, there is the prisoner, and it's for you to say whether it's the yard-arm now, or wait until we get to Salem."

As the whaler commodore ceased speaking, the pirate captain stepped on deck, and doffing his cap politely, said with a charming smile:

"Gentlemen, we meet again."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE STRANGE CRUISER.

THE assembled sea-captains had anticipated a different looking man from the handsome, cheerful fellow who had gotten their money for "a special service" from them.

They expected to see the same person, of course—but they looked forward to his being woe-begone, cast down, frightened, and generally wretched.

When they were greeted with his "We meet again, gentlemen," it took them flat aback, to use a sea phrase.

They were astounded, to put it mildly.

They looked at each other for consolation in their amazement.

It was identically the same man, cheerful-faced, handsome, dressed like a sea dandy, and with a smile upon his countenance that was positively winning.

Captain Jubal and the two captains he had on board with him, enjoyed the almost consternation of their mates.

Here was a man, scarcely over twenty-four,

commanding a pirate craft, and dressed in the very extreme of fashion, a prisoner in their midst, one who, within the hour, might be swung up to the yard-arm of the ship for buccaneering, confronting them with the air of a young dandy, a smile as sweet as a woman's, and a merry twinkle in his eyes.

Confronting two-score stern old seamen, grown gray in service, and whose voices were like thunder and their eyes a terror to their own men who went wrong.

They had all gotten their worst scowls on to utterly annihilate the wicked pirate with a look.

But he had not even wilted, and the whaler commodore and the two captains who had been on the Niagara more than enjoyed the situation.

Not one of those summoned on board said a word; they simply looked, and in silence awaited for Captain Jubal to speak.

"Gentlemen," said the old whaler chief, and there was a twinkle in his eye, in spite of the seven hundred missing dollars from his pocket—"Gentlemen, there is the prisoner, and each of you know of what he has been guilty."

"Pray appoint a judge, and proceed to try him for his crime of piracy upon the high seas."

Thus urged, the captains put their heads together, so to speak, and the "commodore" was made judge, and the "court" was ready to try the prisoner.

Captain Jubal having been the first victim, was asked to give his testimony.

The prisoner was given a seat on deck where every eye could be upon him.

There was no bravado about him, simply interest it seemed in what was going on, as though he was not the one who was to be tried for his life by a body of men whom he had victimized.

In his trial, a court was to sit on his case, every man of whom he had robbed.

The "judge" told his story quietly and to the point.

Then others were called upon, and they gave about the same testimony.

All present were willing to testify as to what Captain Skinner of the Winged Whale had said, but that skipper's fleet craft was far away, and such testimony would only be "hearsay" evidence.

When all had testified the prisoner was asked what he had to say.

"Most worthy judge advocate, and commodore of this great fleet, and honored captains, I have very little to say," said the prisoner, rising.

His manner was respectful, yet there was the suggestion of a quiet smile of confidence about him.

"I have listened, as became a man accused of piracy, to what my accusers have testified, and each one has admitted that I showed him a letter from his individual owner asking for the amount of money I needed."

"Now, to refute this evidence in my favor, you have the story of a worthy Captain Skinner of the messenger brig Winged Whale, who tells you that I overhauled him at sea, boarded his vessel and robbed him on the water highway of the world of some fifteen thousand dollars."

"Now, honored judge advocate, and worthy gentlemen captains, I do not see how you can hang me until you prove that Captain Skinner did not rob himself of the money and accuse me of being the pirate, for you have my letters and receipt against his word, and he is not present."

"In view of these facts, presented, I would respectfully urge you not to hang me to-day, but to defer that interesting ceremony until you arrive in Salem."

With a bow the prisoner resumed his seat.

The "judge" looked at the jury of captains two-score, and the skippers looked at the judge.

The latter saw that it was for him to speak, and what he said was to the point.

"Gentlemen, the prisoner is right, and I am half-inclined to believe there is some mistake."

"I will be responsible for his safe delivery to the proper authorities, and we will take him to Salem for trial."

Not a voice dissented, and the prisoner rose.

"Gentlemen, my heartfelt thanks; but I beg you will not allow your worthy commodore to make himself responsible for me, for no man can do that."

The captains to a man liked the pirate, and, after a glass of grog, in which they drank to his being able to prove his innocence, they departed for their respective vessels and the fleet moved on its course once more.

When the next morning dawned the swift flag-ship had dropped all but a few sail out of sight astern; but one vessel was coming on with a rush that was not of the fleet.

It was a schooner, and an armed vessel it was evident.

She was a beauty, too, from her long, narrow hull to the top of her lofty topmasts.

The American flag was at her peak, and she came on with a rush, rapidly overhauling the flag-ship.

As she drew near a young officer hailed:

"Ahoy! is that the flag-ship of the whaling fleet?"

"Ay, ay, sir! Captain Jubal, at your service," responded the old whaler.

"I learned from one of your fleet that you have on board a man suspected of being Meredith, the buccaneer, of the brig Red Dove?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"I am Captain Talbot, of the American cruiser Lance, and will relieve you of your prisoner, for his brig is now my prize."

A cheer broke from the crew of the whaler, and all eyes were turned upon the prisoner.

His face did not change color, and he said, quietly:

"It is your duty, Captain Jubal, to give me up."

"Ay, ay, captain, he is at your service," called out the old whaler.

"Lay to, sir, and I'll send a boat aboard!"

This was done, and Captain Jubal said:

"I have liked you, young man, and hoped you could prove you were not the bloody pirate we thought you."

"Good-by, and if there is a getting-out place for you, I hope you'll clear yourself."

"Thank you, sir, and I'll not forget you," and with no cloud upon his face the young sailor left and was soon on board the beautiful schooner.

As she fell off on her course the Stars and Stripes were hauled down, and up in their place went the black field and the red globe in the center, while up to the fore was hoisted the Red Dove flag.

"Good-by, Captain Jubal, and a safe voyage to you."

"There was a way to get out of my scrape, so I took it—adieu!"

The speaker was the pirate captain, who stood upon the quarter-deck of the schooner, and evidently was master there.

"By the whale that swallowed Jonah! I've been tricked," cried Captain Jubal, and the oath he swore would not look well in print.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"FOR MUTINY AND MURDER ON THE HIGH SEAS."

MY kind reader will recall that we left my hero, Mark Monte, in the hands of the Philistines, so to speak, for he had just been arrested by the town constable, upon the charge of "mutiny and murder upon the high seas."

The young sailor stood like one struck dumb.

Here was another blow upon him, and he could not but stagger under its terrible force, for it hit at his honor, his liberty and made him appear to the world as the basest of criminals.

But what he had passed through in the few years that had been his, had made him a man of a nerve not shaken readily, and in a moment he had recovered himself and said:

"Constable Cassidy, are you not mistaken in the man?"

"No, for you are Mark Monte?"

"I am, sir."

"Then you are my man."

"And your warrant?"

"Is here."

Mark took the paper and glanced at it.

"Yes, it is truly for me, for here is my name, and you are commanded to bring my body, dead or alive, it reads."

"Yes, so you are satisfied, sir?"

"Oh, yes, perfectly well satisfied, my dear sir, as to the fact that you have come to arrest me, but not as to the charge, as it reads here, of 'mutiny and murder upon the high seas.'"

"That is for you to disprove."

"Ah, yes."

"I hope your delay, sir, is not with a view of offering resistance," said the constable.

"Oh no, sir, not in the least, for I have been an officer, and am too good a disciplinarian to resist a man in the discharge of his duty."

"I am glad to hear this, sir, for I was told to expect trouble."

Mark smiled and glanced at the constable's associates.

"Oh, I see, and so brought these gentlemen with you; but let me say right here, if I was guilty of the charge, you three men could never take me alive."

"Not being guilty, I yield to your authority, but if I have not seemed anxious to hurry off, it has been because you have surprised me at my hearthstone, with the only one now left to me in the world, my sister here, whose heart you know, must feel this charge against her brother, her only protector."

"I have had much trouble of late years, our riches left us, our father was taken, then I have just returned from a long and cruel captivity, in which I was the slave of an Arab master, and I came back to see my mother die, almost of starvation, and to find that she and my sister had been bitterly persecuted."

"Now, when I believed our clouds had gone by, you appear and arrest me, and upon the cruelest and most infamous charge that was ever brought against an innocent man, so, gentlemen, if I have not seemed anxious to rush to prison with you, under all the circumstances, you will, I am sure, pardon me."

The tone of sarcasm was biting in the extreme, and the officers felt it, and more, their hearts were touched, for they were convinced that the

man before them was not guilty of the charge against him.

"One word more, gentlemen?"

"Certainly, sir," returned Constable Cassidy with marked politeness.

"Who are my accusers?"

"Captain Ezra Vail, sir."

"Ah!" and the expression implied much.

Turning to his sister Mark said calmly:

"Ethel, you have heard all?"

"Yes, brother."

"Your lover Captain Meredith accused of piety, and your brother of mutiny and murder."

"I have heard, Mr. Monte, that your sister was engaged to the captain of the brig Sea Dove, and I have news of him, if you care to hear it, though it's news she will not wish to hear," said the constable.

"Tell me, oh tell me!" cried Ethel.

"The whaler Erie, belonging to Vail & Company, put into Boston yesterday for repairs, having been caught in a storm, and Captain Lorne came on here by coach and reports he outsailed the fleet and that the Sea Dove, known under her pirate name of Red Dove, robbed every craft of the whaling fleet, but was captured, and is a prisoner on the Niagara, being brought here for trial, and this pirate's name is Captain Meredith."

"I am under too base a charge myself, of which I am innocent, Constable Cassidy, to believe this accusation against a man who won my sister's love."

"God bless you for those words, Mark, for you give me hope," and Ethel sprung into his arms.

The next moment he had gone, Constable Cassidy, out of respect to Ethel, not putting the irons upon his prisoner's wrists, until they had left the cottage.

Sinking into her chair Ethel buried her face in her hands, and so remained for a long while, the picture of grief.

Then a knock at the door startled her, and springing to her feet she called out in a voice hoarse with emotion:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and—*Captain Malcolm Meredith entered the room.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

GUILT, OR INNOCENCE?

THE first thought of Ethel Monte, when she beheld none other than Captain Malcolm Meredith enter the room, was that her trust in him was verified, and that he was not what they had tried to make her believe, a pirate.

How could he have been a prisoner on board the whale ship Niagara, and yet be free then?

The Niagara belonged to Ezra Vail & Co., and this too was against the thought of guilt on the part of her lover, and she believed all to be a plot against him.

No, whoever it was who had been committing piracies among the vessels of the whaling fleet, and who had been captured, it certainly was not Captain Meredith, Ethel felt assured.

She therefore stepped toward him and said, yet with a certain constraint of manner the sailor could not but notice:

"I am glad to see you back, Captain Meredith, after your long absence."

There seemed to be a reproach implied in the greeting, and the young sailor seemed to see it.

He was dressed in the same handsome style that was his wont, and his face seemed to have become a deeper brown; but he looked as though he might have been ill.

He stepped forward quickly, and the sunny smile that had been upon his face when he entered the room, changed to a look of sadness.

"I am glad to hear you say I am welcome, Miss Ethel, and I hope I may say that it is a happy moment to me again to see you face to face after my long absence."

"The fault was with you, Captain Meredith, for you had it in your power to come at your will."

"Ah, no, there you wrong me, for I could not come at my will, and the moment I could do so, I came."

"You are master of your own vessel and movements, I believe, Captain Meredith."

"Ah, yes; but I have been a prisoner."

"A prisoner?" and Ethel started and turned pale at the thought of its being true after all about his having been taken by the Niagara.

"Yes, I was captured in a very unexpected manner, and I was unable to write a line to you, and it cut me to the heart, I assure you."

"Not that I doubted you, Ethel, for I felt that you would be true to the promises you had made me when I departed from here, as somehow I do not believe you to be one whose affections can change readily."

"It hurt me because I knew not what you would think of me, for you know I did not expect to be gone over a year."

"Yes, I remember, and two years have now passed."

"Ah, yes, and it has seemed to me many more in my cruel captivity in Africa."

"Captivity in Africa?" said Ethel, in surprise.

"Yes, I was captured by a Moorish corsair,

and so have been a captive to a Moor, one who has been my master, and would have been yet, had I not escaped."

"And you have not been with the whaling fleet?"

"No, indeed, though I left here, I remember, with the intention of joining the fleet."

"I, however, came upon at sea a wrecked vessel-of-war."

"She was Spanish, and I took her officers and crew to Spain, and from there sailed on a voyage that would have been profitable had I not run into a fleet of Moorish corsairs, and gotten captured, as I told you, Ethel; but you have not told me of your mother."

Ethel gave a sigh of relief.

The pirate of the whaling fleet was not then her lover, as report had said.

The question about her mother brought her thoughts to her sorrows, and she said sadly:

"My mother is dead!"

"Dead! Your good, noble mother dead, Ethel?"

"This is, indeed, bitter and sad news for me!"

"When did this occur, and how?"

"Tell me all about it, Ethel."

He moved nearer to her, and glanced about the room.

It was more comfortable even than when he had last seen it.

She certainly looked to be in prosperous surroundings from the appearance of all about her.

He had also noted by the bright moonlight that the cottage looked more cozy and trim, and a dread came into his heart, but only for an instant, that he might find her wedded.

He knew that he had known her but a short while before leaving, that she really knew nothing of him, and that though he had gone away pledged to her, and with her mother's consent, two years brought many changes, and he had really feared for a second, that he had lost her.

"Tell me of your poor mother," he said, earnestly.

Then Ethel told him all, of the wrecking of the Dart on the coast of Africa, the captivity of her brother, and how her mother and herself had been brought down to such abject want that piece by piece the furniture had to be sold.

Then the cottage was sacrificed, and doctor's bills, medicine and food had swamped all their money, until the end came and Ezra Vail would have moved her dying mother out into a barn near, but for the return of her brother.

"And this creature, Vail, calls himself a man?" said the young captain, when he had heard the whole sad story.

"Yes, and he has but this night done another cruel act against my poor brother, for he has been arrested for mutiny and murder upon the high seas, in fact has been accused of the wrecking of the Dart, and thus the loss of the crew and robbing the vessel, and, the sole survivor, they have determined to do their worst to punish him."

"No doubt of it; they will hang him if in their power, and it looks to me that they will have a case against him, as you say he will not tell how he got the money he fitted up his home with."

"No, for he told me that Rupert Vail had asked him where it came from, and then hinted that he had robbed the brig, and wrecked her just to do so."

"Well, he must not hang, that is certain."

"There is one way he can be saved, if all else fails," said Ethel.

"And how is that?" asked the young sailor, who seemed to be most deeply interested.

"I know all these persecutions will cease if I pledge myself to marry Rupert Vail, for—"

Ethel stopped quickly, for a bitter oath broke from the lips of Malcolm Meredith, and she was positively frightened at the look that came over his handsome face.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ETHEL TELLS ALL.

"Do you mean to say, Ethel, that this man, Rupert Vail, has been trying to force you to marry him by persecuting you beyond all endurance to bear?"

The voice of the sailor had lost its melody, and had become hard and metallic in sound.

His bright, handsome face was threatening, and his eyes had an ugly look in them which gave Ethel the thought of how terrible he must be in anger.

"I cannot understand it, and I will let you see if you can, Captain Meredith," she said.

"Ah, Ethel, you call me *Captain Meredith*."

"Have you changed toward me?"

"No, oh no."

"I left here, with you pledged to be my wife some day."

"Yes."

"Are you the same?"

"I am."

"The pledge still holds good?"

"It does."

"God bless you, darling: I knew you would be true, for women such as you are could not be false."

"I was sorely tempted, Captain Me—"

"There you go again."

"Malcolm then."

"That is what I wish."

"I was sorely tempted several times to sacrifice myself to save my mother, and to give her every comfort, for he told me if I would become his wife he would give mother a home like a palace."

"I learned something of the Vails when I was last in this port, Ethel, and it was said of them that they lived to make gold."

"Though generous in business, they were only so to make more gold, and it seems to me very strange that even you, with your magnificent beauty, could win Rupert Vail when you were so poor."

"Is there something back of it all, Ethel?"

"What could there be?"

"You know of no chance by which you may be interested in a fortune?"

"No, indeed; I am only poor Ethel Monte, and all I have in the world is right here in this little cottage."

"Well, then he is a different man than I took him for, is this Rupert Vail, for I felt certain that gold alone would cause him to pledge himself to any woman, and no matter how ugly and coarse she might be, if she was an heiress she could win his love."

"Now I do not wonder that he loves you, for how could he help doing so; but I do wonder at his bitter persecutions to force you to marry him."

"But it shall cease now."

"What would you do, Malcolm?" asked Ethel, still gazing into the handsome face of the young man and not liking the threatening look he wore.

"Tell me just what he has done in each instance, Ethel."

There were so many little words and acts which the maiden could not explain; but he had come to her with the money from the Dart, after her brother had sailed.

Then his father had purchased a handsome home in Salem, giving up his residence in G—, where he had been living for many years.

Rupert Vail had appeared to be friendly, and yet there was to her in his actions only mock friendship.

He had really done little, but after each rebuff or refusal by Ethel, Vail the elder had brought some persecution upon her mother, and it was the senior who had demanded that she should marry Rupert, if she did not wish to see her dying mother turned out of her home.

Then it was the father who had forced Mark to sign a contract binding himself to his will, if he would let his mother remain yet awhile in the cottage, and that paper he had refused to return to the sailor, even when the money for the rent was placed before him by Mark.

Next came the story of Mark's meeting with Rupert that very evening on the shore, near the cottage, and his accusations, which had caused her brother to hurl him from him.

Then followed the story of the coming of Constable Cassidy and the arrest of Mark Monte, who had been carried off to prison just a few minutes before his, Malcolm Meredith's, coming.

The face of the young sailor was a study as he listened to all that the maiden had suffered.

Then he said, and there was a world of sympathy in his tones:

"My good, dear child, how you have been made to feel both sorrow and suffering."

"But it must all end now; yes, they must be made to know that you have protectors, and your brother is not friendless, and at their mercy."

"But are you alone here in your home?"

"No; there is a faithful old couple who live in the rear wing of the cottage, and do the little work there is to do for a home and food."

"I am glad you are not alone, Ethel; but I will now leave you and go down into the town to see just how matters stand with your brother."

He was fairly startled at her sudden vehemence and earnest words:

"No, no, no! you must not go there, for your life is in danger, too!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

AGAINST ALL PROOF.

THE moment that Ethel's words implied that his—Malcolm Meredith's—life was in danger, the fire and reckless air of the handsome sailor returned to him.

Her sufferings and her brother's danger had saddened his fine face, and softened the tones of his fine voice.

But the thought of trouble to himself brought a smile—nay, a light laugh, and he asked, in his usual indifferent manner:

"And am I, too, to be sacrificed, Ethel?"

"You are in as much danger as is Mark, this very minute."

"But how?"

"First tell me how you came here?"

"To this cottage?"

"No, to Salem."

"By sea."

"Where from?"

"Across the sea."

"Pardon me, Malcolm, for questioning you."

but I hope you will submit to it in good grace?"

"Yes, indeed, my lady love," and the old manner, which in the past had so fascinated Ethel, had wholly returned to her lover.

"What port did you leave last?"

He slightly hesitated, and then answered:

"Santiago de Cuba."

"I thought you said that you had crossed the sea?"

"I did, leaving Africa after my escape, and sailing to Cuba."

"There I purchased a vessel, and came hither."

"And your brig?"

"Alas! my beautiful vessel was captured where I was, as I told you, by the Moors."

"So you lost her?"

"Ah, yes."

"But built another?"

"Yes, and one on her model too, for she was built by the same people, only she is schooner-rigged, and I may say even better than the old Dove."

"And the name of this new vessel?"

"The same as the other, the Sea Dove."

"And is she in port now?"

"Yes, I ran in, arriving at an anchorage just after dark, and then came out here to see you, rowing myself in my gig to your landing."

"And you have not been near the Salem whaling fleet?"

"I have not."

"Nor seen any of the vessels of the fleet?"

"Not one; but why are you so urgent about this?"

Ethel was silent for a minute and then said:

"The month that you stayed in Salem Harbor, Malcolm, caused you to be pretty well known, for you are a very remarkable-looking man, as I suppose you know."

"I never discovered it until I found I had attracted your eye, my sweet Ethel."

"Well, you attracted other eyes than mine, and people spoke of you as the Sea Dandy and all that, and many rumors were about regarding you, such as that you were a man of wealth and used your brig as a yacht, not caring whether you got a cargo or not."

"They seemed interested in my affairs."

"Yes, gossips are always interested in the affairs of others to the detriment of their own."

"Then it became known that you had visited me daily, and of course I was asked, as was mother also, all about you, and the servant we had then reported it around that she knew we were engaged."

"Without hearing from you myself, word came that the brig had visited the fleet, collected a tax from all the captains, pretending that the owners had sent for such money."

"My brig?" was the smiling query.

"Yes."

"And the owners had not sent such an order?"

"No, and the brig went back after awhile and raised another tax from the captains."

"They must have been very verdant to pay it."

"Oh, it worked all right, and no one suspected wrong until Captain Skinner went in the messenger craft Winged Whale and was, as fleet as his vessel, overhauled and robbed of the money he had to pay off certain seamen of the fleet."

"By this same brig?"

"Yes."

"This was piracy, Ethel."

"Certainly, and so the captains then found out that the Red Dove was a pirate."

"The Red Dove?"

"Your brig, yes."

"But my brig was the Sea Dove."

"True, but this one is the Red Dove."

Malcolm Meredith laughed, and asked:

"Well, who was her skipper?"

"Captain Meredith!"

The sailor started, and Ethel saw his face change color.

"He used my name?" he asked in a low tone.

"He certainly did, Malcolm."

"I must see to this, for—"

"No, no, you must not go into Salem, Malcolm, for Captain Skinner, and others on his vessel who saw you here and know you well by sight, vow that the one who commanded the Red Dove was you."

"They say that he looked like me?"

"They say that he was you, and as I said before, Malcolm, you are a man that few resemble."

"This might make it bad for me if I go down into the town," said the sailor thoughtfully.

"It would, indeed, for you would be arrested and thrown into prison to await the arrival of the fleet, and only to-night the constable told brother and myself that you had been captured and was a prisoner on board the flagship, having been caught in some way, and that you were to be brought here for trial as a pirate."

"Fools!" said the sailor, as though to himself, and then he added, pleasantly:

"Well, my being here now with the sweetest girl I ever saw, does not look as though I was a prisoner on board the whaling fleet's flagship, does it?"

"No, and your coming so startled me, after what I had heard."

"And may I ask if you have believed me to be what the busy tongues of gossips have made me out, Ethel?"

"Malcolm, I love you, and that alone should prove my trust in you."

"Could I love a pirate?"

"Bless you, my darling; but they may bring strong proof to show that the prisoner is Malcolm Meredith, for I cannot be here when the fleet arrives, for certain reasons."

"Would you believe if he looked like me?"

"Against all proofs I would believe in you, Malcolm," was the firm reply, and very fervently came the response:

"God bless you, Ethel!"

Then a silence fell upon the two, each busy with their own thoughts, until a knock came at the door.

The maiden started, the man's face did not change color, but he said in a whisper:

"I will step into yonder room and wait, Ethel."

Then Ethel went to the door and Constable Cassidy entered the room, and it was with a sinking heart the maiden saw him, for she was sure that he knew of her lover's presence there, and had come to arrest him.

CHAPTER XXX.

CONSTABLE CASSIDY'S REPORT.

ETHEL'S look asked the constable why he had come, for she did not utter a word.

Constable Cassidy was not a hard-hearted man, and he felt a deep sympathy for the desolate maiden, so he said quickly:

"Don't look frightened, miss, for I came back for a little talk with you," he said kindly.

"Be seated, sir, please," and Ethel placed a chair purposely with the back toward the adjoining room.

"I feel sorry, Miss Monte, that you have had so much sorrow, and especially that I had to give you another blow to-night; but I do not believe they can prove anything against your brother, and my advice to you is to go to the best attorney in town, and have him defend Master Monte against—well, I'll say it to you, only do not say I gave you the hint—against the persecutions of Ezra Vail and his son."

"I'm not blind, Miss Monte, and I know that all would be well with the Vails toward you, if you accepted the addresses of the young man; but for Heaven's sake do not let them force you to free your brother by sacrificing yourself."

"Now there's another thing I may mention to you, as it may please you to know it, and that is the coming in an hour ago of the barque, Lookout, and she is one of the whaling fleet and leads the others a few days."

"And brings she any news of the fleet?" quickly asked Ethel.

"Ah, yes, miss, for she says they caught it in a storm, and the flagship was rather roughly handled, being ahead and catching the full strength of the tempest."

"She's a fleet one, is the Niagara, but this setback let some of the other flyers of the fleet drop her astern, and she spoke Captain Jubal and he had a strange story to tell."

"What was it?" eagerly asked Ethel.

"Well, I told you about the pirate brig, Red Dove?"

"Yes."

"Well, miss, Captain Meredith of that brig—"

"Captain Meredith?"

"Yes, miss, I'm sorry to say there is no doubt but that the handsome young pirate who was here, is the man who robbed the whaler captains."

"I am all attention, Constable Cassidy," calmly said Ethel.

"Well, miss, the skipper of the barque Lookout reports that he spoke Captain Jubal of the Niagara, as he passed, and was told to say he was delayed by his damages, but coming along all right."

"Then he told the Lookout to report that Red Dove had again spoken him, and, after Captain Skinner's story of his robbery, the young pirate had been enticed on board the flagship and captured."

"The whaler captains had been signaled, and trial of the pirate decided in sending him on to Salem."

"But a day or so after an armed schooner, flying the Stars and Stripes, and sailing like a witch, overhauled the Niagara, and an officer in uniform reported how he had the Red Dove as a prize—"

"Captured?"

"He said he had the brig as a prize, miss, and wished to take the pirate captain who was a prisoner on board the flagship."

"Of course Captain Jubal gave him up to what he supposed was an American cruiser, whose captain had a right to demand the prisoner, and once on board the vessel the buccaneer chief suddenly assumed command, and bade Captain Jubal farewell."

"Do you mean that the armed vessel was not a cruiser?" and Ethel was deeply excited, but kept calm.

"That's what I mean, Miss Monte, for it was the Red Dove altered into a schooner."

"A schooner?" echoed Ethel, and her voice gave a great bound.

"Yes, miss, she was unarmed when her captain was captured; but ran off hull down, changed her rig from a brig to a schooner, altered the paint somewhat, got her guns out of the hold, brought on deck her whole crew and in uniform, and then, with the nation's flag at her peak, ran after the Niagara, and I've told you the result, and a more daring, clever game was never played."

"It was, indeed; but is there no doubt as to this outlaw captain?"

"You mean as to his being Captain Malcolm Meredith?"

"Yes, sir."

"There seems not to be the slightest doubt, for all who saw him here, and again in the whaling fleet, say he is the same man, and I don't see well how two men can be so much alike, for Captain Meredith was a very striking-looking personage, Miss Monte."

"Yes; but did he call himself Captain Meredith?"

"They say that he did, and his vessel, here known as the Sea Dove, there was called the Red Dove."

"I sincerely thank you, Constable Cassidy, for your great kindness, and if you learn anything else of importance, will you be so good as to send me word?"

"I will, with pleasure, miss; but you are sure you have no fear in staying here alone, for if so, I will send one of my night watch to patrol the place."

"You are most kind indeed; but I am not readily alarmed, and I have two old servants within call, while my brother's firearms are in the house, and I know how to use them well; but again I thank you."

"I am only too willing to serve you, miss, and I hope you won't forget what I told you about the Vails?"

"No; I remember."

"And the attorney, for they wish to get Mark Monte out of the way, I am sure."

"I'll not forget to see the attorney."

"Now I must be off, miss, and anything I can do for you, or Master Mark, I will," and the constable arose to depart, when Ethel held out her hand and again thanked him.

Hardly had the door closed behind him when she turned and glanced toward the room which, when the knock of the constable was heard, Malcolm Meredith had entered.

She called to him, but there was no response.

She entered the room, but it was empty.

The mysterious young captain had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ETHEL'S HOPE.

IN vain did Ethel Monte look about the house for Captain Meredith.

He had mysteriously disappeared from the room into which he had gone when the knock of the constable was heard at the door.

She saw that the door leading out upon the piazza, was unlocked, and of course he had left the room by that way, but so quietly she had heard no sound.

He had without doubt heard the story of the constable regarding him, and it certainly looked very suspicious that he should have left as he did.

What could it mean other than that he felt that the proofs of his being the buccaneer would be more than he could set aside by his own word only?

Still Ethel was not one to despair, nor to doubt one whom she loved.

It certainly looked very black for her lover; but she hoped, she believed that he could prove his innocence.

She locked up the house and there sat waiting for a long while, hoping that he would reappear.

But as he did not she went to the door and looked out.

She uttered a cry as she beheld in the bright moonlight a schooner standing out of the harbor.

She was a sailor's daughter and she knew a ship so well she could view one with an eye as experienced as a seaman.

She had seen all manner of vessels sail into the harbor, and out again, past the cottage, and the one whose appearance startled her, as she stepped out upon the piazza, she knew to be different from any craft then in port.

She was too trim, too beautiful to be a freight-bearer, and she said aloud:

"It is his vessel and he is putting out to sea."

"Oh! what does it, what can it mean?"

The craft was a schooner, under mainsail and jib only, and she was standing close inshore.

As she got opposite to the cottage she set her foresail, and then up went a flying jib and topsails, and the beautiful vessel seemed fairly to fly over the moonlit waters.

Ethel noticed the large sails the schooner spread, and particularly marked the wide space between the masts, making the foresail a very large one, while the masts rose to a very lofty height, and the bowsprit seemed to run half the length of the hull out over the bows.

Silently, like a specter the beautiful vessel slipped by, and then disappeared on her way to sea.

Ethel watched her until the last glimmer of the white sails was visible, and then she went into the cottage very wretched at heart.

She retired to her room and went to bed; but it was not to sleep until, just at dawn, utterly exhausted, she dropped into deep slumber.

She was awakened by old Margaret, calling her to breakfast, and the woman said:

"I called you half an hour ago, but you seemed to be enjoying your sleep so much, Miss Ethel, I had not the heart to awake you."

"But where is the young master, for his bed has not been sleep in all night."

"Ah! Margaret, our troubles are not yet at an end, for my brother Mark was arrested last night by Constable Cassidy," sadly said Ethel.

"Master Mark arrested?" almost groaned the old woman.

"Yes, and I believe the charge against him is that he wrecked the brig he sailed in, just to rob her."

"It's a lie! an infamous lie," angrily said Margaret, and she then heard all that Ethel wished to tell her, and Adam, her husband, was dispatched into the town to see what news he could gather.

He was gone about two hours and returned to say that the people were much excited over the arrest of the young sailor, and few believed that he could be proven guilty.

He also said that Mark Monte was to be tried in two days more and that his accusers were Ezra Vail & Company.

In the afternoon, dressed plainly and wearing a thick veil to wholly hide her face, Ethel Monte left the cottage and walked rapidly into town.

She made her way to the jail, a strong stone structure, surrounded by a wall, and asked the guard at the gate if she could see her brother.

The keeper was called and consented to let her enter her brother's cell.

She found him in one wing of the jail, in a cell that was the best in the dismal structure, and though his face brightened at sight of her he said, sadly:

"Ah, Ethel, have you come to this gloomy place to see me?"

"Yes, brother, I have come, and I have much to say to you," and she whispered:

"Captain Meredith returned last night."

"Ah! and proved his innocence of the cruel charges against him?" he asked, quickly.

"I do not believe him guilty, Mark, but his actions are most mysterious, not to say suspicious," and she told her brother of the visit of the commander of the Sea Dove, the coming of Constable Cassidy, and how mysteriously Malcolm Meredith had departed from the cottage.

"And has he left port?"

"Ah, yes, his vessel sailed last night."

"This is strange; but I am the victim of such a vile accusation myself, that it will take much to make me believe him to be guilty, Ethel."

"And it will also be hard to convince me of his guilt; but I wish he was less mysterious in his actions."

"Trust him, Ethel, until you have convincing proof," was the frank response of the young sailor, and his words of confidence in her lover again raised her spirits and hopes in her lover's honor.

Then Ethel spoke to her brother about a lawyer, and said that she had already written a note to a lawyer in whom all had confidence, to undertake his defense, but the attorney would not be in town until the arrival

of the coach from Boston, whither he had gone.

After some further talk with her brother, Ethel departed, bidding him keep up good heart, and then, as the stage had arrived, she went to Lawyer Browne's office, and placing in his hands a couple of hundred dollars, begged him to defend her brother.

"I shall gladly do so, Miss Monte, and we must get him out of this unfortunate scrape."

"I will go at once to see him," said the lawyer, and much cheered by his words, Ethel returned home, arriving there just at sunset.

As she entered the gate a form arose from a seat in the little summer-house in the garden and approached her.

It was Wanda the Witch of Salem.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

"WHY, Wanda, you startled me!" said Ethel, as she recognized the weird and queer woman whom the people of Salem, who were superstitious, looked upon as a witch, and allied to the Evil One.

"Ah, pretty one, I would not wish to frighten you, for you have sorrow enough to bear without being made to suffer needlessly."

"I came to talk with you."

"Come in, then, and I will have some tea and supper for you."

"I'll take the tea, for it is chilly to-night, and will warm me; but I break bread under no one's roof, not even yours, my dear child."

Ethel had never known her to be so gentle of manner before, and she led her into the cozy sitting-room, where a log fire burned cheerfully upon the hearth.

She had not seen Wanda the Witch often of late; but many weird stories of her were going about the town constantly.

She drew up the easy-chair for her, and then went out and made her some tea, putting in it pure cream, and filling a beautiful china cup for her to drink it from.

"You are a girl of a noble heart, my child, and I only wish I could save you from the sorrows that seem to dog your steps; but your brother is jailed, I heard?" and she said the latter very abruptly.

"Alas, yes."

"He's accused of mutiny, murder, and wrecking Ezra Vail's brig."

"Yes, Wanda."

"He's as innocent of crime as you are."

"I believe it, I know it," earnestly said the maiden.

"They intend to hang him."

"Ah, Wanda!"

"I say it; they intend to hang him."

"But I have engaged Lawyer Browne to defend him."

"Bah! Lawyers are no good, except to look wise, take your money and do nothing to help you."

"But Lawyer Browne seems interested in the case, and he thinks he can clear Mark."

"You paid him?"

"I offered him two hundred dollars, but he said wait until he had gotten my brother free."

"Humph! that shows he expects to lose the case, and has heart enough not to wish to rob you."

"He is better than I gave him credit for."

"I believe he will do all in his power."

"He may, and that is nothing, for you have to fight gold, and plenty of it, and that is the most powerful argument."

"I do not understand you, Wanda."

"Vail & Co. are very rich, and they are determined to hang your brother."

"I believe they will if they can."

"Oh, they can, for gold will give them the power against all of Lawyer Browne's eloquence."

"They have decided to hang your brother, and no lawyer can save him."

"Oh, Wanda! you frighten me terribly, for what can I do to save him?"

"Let me save him!"

"You?"

"Yes, me, Wanda, the Witch of Salem."

"But what can you do, my good Wanda?"

"I can do what men cannot do—I can save that poor boy from his foes."

"I only wish I knew how."

"Why, girl, you can save him too, if you will."

"I?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how, and I will gladly do so."

"Become the wife of Rupert Vail," was the abrupt response.

Ethel started.

Was the woman there as the pleader for Rupert Vail?

No, she could not believe it.

The woman seemed to read her thoughts, for she said quickly:

"Don't fear me, child, for though I hate others, I am the friend of your brother and yourself."

"I know more than you think I do, and I am not blind."

"I have seen that man, Rupert Vail, persecute you, and though you refused my gold, when I offered it to you in your great need, I did not get angry with you."

"I had plenty, and wished to help you and your sick mother: but you were too proud, and preferred to owe old Vail for rent, your foe that he is, than to owe old Wanda."

"But now it is not gold you need, but help for your brother, and I tell you I will save him."

"Heaven grant you can do so, good Wanda, but I do not see how."

"It is given to me to do things all mortals cannot understand."

"If you sent to Rupert Vail to-night, and told him you would become his wife, your brother would never come to trial for the crimes of which he is accused."

"If you do not do so, without my aid he will be tried, found guilty and hanged."

"Never, for I would marry Rupert Vail first."

"Oh, no, not that, not that."

"You shall never wed that man, for Wanda the Witch will save your brother."

"Bless you, my good Wanda, for somehow I have faith in you, and you give me hope."

"There! that is what I want you to feel, for those beautiful eyes must be dimmed by no more tears, and no more sorrow must cause you heartaches."

"Where is your lover?"

Again Ethel started at the abrupt question.

"My lover?" she asked faintly.

"Yes, the young sailor whom you owed your life to that day you took me home in your skiff."

"It was your kindness to me nearly lost your life that day, and, but for the promptness and nerve of the young captain of the Red Dove, you would have been in your deep sea grave."

"You call him the captain of the Red Dove; it is the Sea Dove that he commands."

"Folks say it is the Red Dove, and call him a buccaneer; but where is he?"

"I do not know."

"He was in port last night."

Ethel almost began to have faith in the woman's powers of witchcraft, for she seemed to know everything.

"Yes, he was in port, and heard the charges against him, so sailed away."

"But he denies that he is guilty."

"And you believe him?"

"Indeed I do."

"Girl, you have wonderful faith, wonderful indeed; but do not let me destroy it, for he is not yet proven guilty, no more than is your brother."

"Now, I am your friend, and your brother's, and I wish you to go to the jail to-morrow and tell your brother that there is one way only to save his neck, and that is by making his escape, and that I intend to help him, to set him free, if not before the trial, afterward, for he is sure to be proven guilty. Tell him to be ever ready to go, and not to let anything surprise him."

"Do this, and be careful no one hears you tell him."

"Good-night," and without another word the strange woman arose, took up her staff and left the cottage.

But somehow Ethel believed in her and felt that she and Mark had a friend in need in Wanda the Witch.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LAST RESORT.

WANDA THE WITCH had told Ethel Monte there was a good deal of talk in town about the arrest of Mark Monte, charged with such a terrible crime as was placed upon him.

The young man's return, as the sole survivor of the wrecked brig Dart, and his finding his mother dying, had attracted considerable attention to him, while his beautiful sister had been much admired, though her haughty mien had kept many aloof from her.

But Ethel was justly proud of the past record of her ancestors, and because she was poor, she preferred to keep to herself.

Many doubtless would have been glad to befriend her, and be friendly with her, had she allowed it.

Then the rumor that she was engaged to Malcolm Meredith, who had turned out to be a pirate, created a sensation, on the top of which came the news of the daring sailor's escape, and it was followed by the arrest of Mark Monte.

All knew who had made the charge and caused the arrest of Mark Monte, and it was supposed that Ezra Vail and his son must have good proof on which to found the accusation of Mark Monte's guilt.

What this proof was would come out at the trial; but there were many who could not believe that the magnificent specimen of manhood that Mark Monte was, and one possessing his handsome, daring face and well known courage, could be guilty of a crime so black as mutiny, murder and robbery.

The next day after Wanda's visit, Ethel saw several vessels run into the harbor.

Their weather-beaten appearance, as well as other signs that she read full well, showed them to be whalers, and they must of course belong to Captain Ike Jubal's fleet.

Going down-town, again veiled heavily, Ethel went to the jail, and was permitted to see her brother alone.

After a few words of conversation together he told her that Mr. Browne, the lawyer, had called, and was to fight the case for him.

Then Ethel said, in a voice hardly raised above a whisper, but which was distinctly audible to Mark:

"Brother, I had a visitor last night."

"Ah! Rupert Vail?" he asked, eagerly.

"No, indeed, I am glad to say."

"Who was it?" he asked, in the same low tone in which she spoke.

"One who told me that it was prearranged to get rid of you under this charge brought against you, so that a lawyer could serve you but little."

"This means that I am doomed then?"

"Yes, unless you do one thing."

"And that is?"

"Escape."

"Never!"

"But, brother, you will suffer the full penalty of the law if you do not."

"Ethel, my sister, I am innocent of this charge against me, and I must stand my trial."

"If it goes against me, then I must take the consequences."

"Not if escape is before you."

"Escape from this place is impossible, Ethel, and if it were otherwise, for me to do so would be to cause people to believe me guilty."

"No, no, for you could perhaps prove your innocence."

He shook his head sadly and then asked: "Who has been your visitor, who has been putting a notion into your pretty head for me to escape?"

"You cannot guess."

"Why, Meredith has returned, and of course it is he."

"No, it is a woman."

"A woman?" he asked, in intense surprise.

"Yes, Witch Wanda."

"Why, Ethel?"

"It is true, and you do not know how thoroughly well informed upon the whole affair she seems."

"She told me to come to you and say that your foes meant to bring you in guilty, and that you would be hanged; but that she would aid you to escape, if not before, after your trial."

"No, it cannot be."

"It must, brother."

"No, I'll risk the consequences."

Ethel was silent a moment and then began to appeal to her brother to do as Wanda wished.

But he was firm in his resolve not to fly from the danger facing him.

At last Ethel said, earnestly:

"Well, Mark, as you have refused to do as Witch Wanda and I plead with you to do, there is but one thing to be done."

"Yes, I must stand and face the end, be it what it may, my sweet sister."

"No, you are not to be sacrificed."

"What do you mean, Ethel?"

"I mean that it is better that it should be a life of unhappiness to me, than death at the yard-arm for you."

"I can save you by simply saying the word, and that word I will say, for I will become the wife of Rupert Vail."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FALSE, OR TRUE.

AT the words of his sister Mark Monte sprung to his feet, his face livid with rage and anguish combined.

"Great God! do you wish to drive me mad, Ethel?" he cried.

"No, brother, but I am determined to save you, and, as you refuse to be aided to escape, so that you can yet clear your name of dishonor, I vow to you that I will go to Rupert Vail and sell myself to a life of misery to save you from the gallows."

"God bless you, my sweet sister, you should never make such sacrifice for me, no, a thousand times no!"

"I yield, and place myself at the call of Wanda the Witch."

She threw her arms about his neck and kissing him turned and left the cell.

She dared not trust herself to speak, for fear her nerve would fail her.

Out of the gloomy prison walls she went, out into the bright sunshine, and at once she saw by the crowds that there was some cause of excitement.

She went into a shop near, to make a purchase apparently, but in reality to learn the cause of the undue excitement.

It did not take her long to find out, for men were conversing in groups, and their tones were loud enough for her to hear.

"I tell you," said one, "that the Red Dove rover brought to three of the whaling fleet and demanded the gold they had on board."

"And it was given up?" asked one of the group.

"Given up? Why of course it was."

"But they say the Red Dove is not armed."

"Yes, she does not show a battery on board, and only a score of men; but you remember that when she went off as a brig and came back as a schooner to Captain Jubal's vessel, she was not only armed, but well manned."

"She pretended to be an American cruiser, demanding the pirate prisoner, and when old Jubal gave him up, the first thing he discovered was that it was Meredith, the marauder's own craft, metamorphosed from a merchant brig into a thoroughly armed schooner."

"Have you forgotten that circumstance, Lacey?"

"Oh, no; but it appears to me the whaler captains should not have allowed themselves to be robbed until the pirate did show his claws."

"Oh, the Red Dove has talons, and sharp ones, too, and can show them at will."

"And do the captains of the three last vessels arriving from the whaler fleet, assert that they were robbed by the Red Dove?"

"They do, and of more or less gold, from a thousand to a couple of thousand dollars."

"And where is this Dove with claws, now?"

"No one knows, but she was seen off this coast two days ago by fishing-smacks, and some said she appeared at night, as though coming out of Salem Harbor, and yesterday these three whalers were overhauled and robbed."

"And she is an unarmed brig?"

"They said she was in her schooner rig, and unarmed apparently; but they knew there were claws under her feathers."

"Well, what is to be done about the capture of this bold marauder, Meredith?"

"Ah! that's a question I am glad to answer, for I have volunteered to go as an officer on Skinner's brig the Winged Whale, which Rupert Vail is to command."

"She is as fleet as a bird, and they are putting the guns on board of her now, which old Vail bought from the wrecked English vessel, and we are to have a hundred gallant tars, volunteers from the whalers."

"I wish you luck; but does Rupert Vail command, you say?"

"Yes."

"He's a plucky fellow, I guess, and may make a good fight if he meets the Red Dove."

"Oh, yes, he's game enough, and he's going in a safe craft, with a heavy battery and large crew, and we are sure to come up with the Red Dove, as Meredith seems to be the deadly and untiring foe of the whalers, and he will doubtless be lying in wait for the craft of the fleet, to board and rob them before they reach Salem Harbor."

"Well, as I said before, luck to you, and may you soon string this mysterious marauder up to the yard-arm of the Winged Whale, and make a prize of his beautiful vessel the Red Dove," and the speaker turned away, leaving the volunteer officer for the cruise under Rupert Vail, to make his way on board his vessel.

Poor Ethel had heard all, she had not missed a word, and in almost despair she left the shop and started homeward.

After all she had heard could she still believe in the truth of Malcolm Meredith?

Had he not said his vessel was a schooner, and had he not sailed out of the harbor two nights before, as they had said the Red Dove had done?

"Oh, Heaven, have mercy! Is he true, or false?" she groaned, in agony of spirit as she went homeward.

As she placed her hand upon the cottage gate, her eyes half blinded with tears, she beheld awaiting her, Wanda, the Witch of Salem.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A SEA LAWYER.

THE day after the triumph of Ethel in obtaining her brother's consent to let the Witch of Salem aid him to escape, a gentleman arrived in town on a stage from Boston.

He was a man of strange appearance, for he was humpbacked, wore his white hair upon his shoulders, his face cleanly shaven, and massive gold spectacles.

He dressed in deep black, as though in mourning, and wore his long-tailed frock-coat buttoned up close to the chin, giving him a very slender appearance up to his arms, and then began his hump!

His movements were slow and deliberate, and his voice sonorous, and every accent seemed to be measured.

He asked for the best room in the Salem Inn, said he wished the best of everything, and could pay for them, and gave his name to the landlord as Eben Gull, Esquire, hinting that he was one of the legal fraternity of the great city of New York.

He was given a dinner that he praised most highly, drank a bottle of the landlord's best Burgundy, and then asked the way to the jail.

A boy was sent with him, and was rewarded so generously that he ran all the way back to the tavern to tell his good fortune.

The visitor to the jail said that he wished to see the prisoner Mark Monte, and stated that he was a lawyer.

He was admitted, and said to the guard who went with him:

"My friend, I have legal business with this gentleman, and I desire to hire your time for half an hour."

"Now there is some gold, so go as far off as you can, and stay there until I wish to leave."

There was something about the man that commanded obedience, and when enforced with gold the guard readily obeyed.

Mark Monte regarded his visitor curiously. Who was the very distinguished yet strange-looking person, he wondered.

"Mr. Monte?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let me present myself, sir—Eben Gull, Esquire, and what you might call a sea lawyer."

"I have heard of your arrest, and am here to defend you, without money and without thanks.

"State your case, sir, of the sailing of the brig Dart, her going ashore on the African Coast and what followed up to your arrival here.

"Be concise, please, throwing no words, or any of my valuable time away."

Mark Monte was impressed in spite of himself.

When the visitor first entered he had looked upon him as in some way connected with Wanda the Witch; but he now felt that he was mistaken.

In answer, he said:

"I thank you, Lawyer Gull, but my sister has engaged Mr. Browne to defend me, and I have just had a long talk with him."

"All right, sir; but I shall see Mr. Browne and become his associate in your case."

"Now, do as I asked you, please."

Mark Monte told his story and with a conciseness that seemed to please the "sea lawyer," as he called himself.

At last he said, almost earnestly:

"Did you say your captain's name was Hudson?"

"Yes, sir."

"His first name, please?"

"John Jacob Hudson."

"I see, of Salem?"

"No, sir, of Portland, Maine."

"Yes, and describe him, please."

"A man with red hair and beard, but black eyes, and possessing a very powerful physique."

"Yes, yes; but he was drowned, you say?"

"He must have been hurt, sir, for he would readily have reached the shore, as I did so, though aiding Selim, the Arab mate."

"The captain sunk, then?"

"No, I saw his body on the shore after I reached there; but when the Arab robbers made me go with them to search the dead, I noticed that the body of the captain had been swept back by the waves."

"I see; but this Arab mate, Selim, you called him?"

"Yes, his arm was broken by being dashed against the bulwarks, and I aided him to the shore."

"You were very friendly with him, then?"

"Oh, no, for I did not like the man, as he seemed always to be watching me."

"And he told you that you had an enemy?"

"Yes, sir, but died ere he could tell me who it was."

"Yes, and he was shipped here in Salem?"

"He was."

"Tell me what you knew of this Selim?"

Mark did so, telling that he had been the devoted follower of Captain Ezra Vail, who had saved his life at Alexandria in Egypt years before and as he had proven himself to be a splendid seaman, had allowed him to go on the Dart as mate, to revisit his native land.

The sea lawyer thanked his client, and soon after took his leave, bearing with him a note of introduction to Mr. Browne asking him from Mark Monte, to allow Eben Gull, Esquire, to be associated with him in his defense.

The sea lawyer called upon the Salem attorney and the two had a long talk together, the result of which was that they were confederates on the case of the State vs. Mark Monte.

Then the sea lawyer walked and drove about the town, visited the wharves and the shipping and spent a long time talking with the sailors.

He saw the Winged Whale set sail under command of Captain Rupert Vail, in chase of the daring pirate craft Red Dove, and he noted the enthusiasm that prevailed among all, and the certainty every one seemed to feel that the days of the foe of the whalers, as Captain Meredith was called, were easily numbered.

As Ezra Vail returned to his elegant home, after the sailing of the Winged Whale, he saw the tall form of the stranger behind him, and soon after he had entered his library a servant came in to say that Eben Gull, Esquire, of New York, wished to see him.

"Admit him," said the shipping merchant, supposing it was some one to see him on mercantile business.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN UNKNOWN FRIEND.

LAWYER GULL had attracted the attention of Captain Vail down on the wharf, from which the Winged Whale had sailed, as he had also the interest of many others.

"Captain Ezra Vail, I believe?" he said as he entered the handsome library of the Vail mansion.

"Yes, sir, and your name is Gull?"

"It is, Eben Gull, and I am a lawyer, Captain Vail, and have called on a little matter of business, sir."

"Nice town you have here, sir, fine shipping interests, great whaling port, and your inn here is positively delightful."

"Am something of an epicure, but there was nothing more to be desired in the dinner I had there to-day."

"I had the pleasure of seeing your vessel off, sir, on her cruise to catch that infamous pirate, the Red Dove."

"A fine vessel, sir, and a gallant crew, with a splendid battery, as I judged it to be."

The visitor had given Ezra Vail no opportunity to speak thus far.

He had seated himself comfortably, and when at last he came to a pause, the merchant asked:

"May I inquire the nature of your visit with me, sir?"

"Ah, yes, I had quite forgotten."

"What about that Arab sailor of yours; Selim was his name?"

The question was put with an abruptness that caused Captain Ezra Vail to start and change color, and the sea lawyer smiled blandly as he noted this fact.

"He is dead, sir."

"So it is believed, sir; but no one can swear to that fact, sir."

"Do you know aught regarding him?" asked the merchant captain, quickly, and with a certain tone of anxiety.

"Oh, no, not much, other than that he sailed in your vessel, the Dart, which was wrecked upon the African Coast two years ago."

"Yes, he went as mate of her, and the Dart was purposely wrecked by a young villain whom I made second mate, and aided all in my power."

"Yes, she was wrecked, the crew murdered by this ingrate and the vessel was robbed."

"Have you proof of this, sir?"

"I have all the proof I need, and the fellow shall hang for his crime."

"Don't get excited, my dear captain, for I only wished to know if I could learn from you something about this Arab, your slave, I believe?"

"No, he was my friend, sir."

"Ah, yes, and did you expect him back to this country?"

"Of course I did; but what do you know about him, may I ask?"

"So little that I come to you for more information."

"I can give you none; but what interest do you hold in him?"

"Only to know if he is really dead?"

"Well, he is, murdered as I said."

"My dear sir, you should be a little careful about making charges that you have not the proof of; but that is your affair, still I would like to say, if you will take my advice, you had better not bring this young sailor, Mark Monte, to trial."

"Not bring him to trial?"

"And why, sir?"

"It will be very awkward for you not to be able to prove all you charge against him; but, as I said, that is your affair."

"Good-evening, Captain Vail."

"But stay, sir, what was your business with me?" and in spite of himself Vail was impressed by his visitor and annoyed too.

"Oh, it was merely to find out if Selim the Arab was dead, and to offer that little advice about Mark Monte."

Captain Vail would have said more, would have detained his strange visitor, but the latter quickly left the room and the merchant was in a mood that worried him.

Who and what was this strange man?

Why had he come to see him?

What was Selim the Arab to him?

And more still, what was Mark Monte to him?

These questions the merchant could not answer, and his face showed his anxiety.

Then, too, he was most anxious about his son, who had persisted in going upon this expedition after the Red Dove, and might be brought back dead.

The truth was that Ezra Vail was in no enviable frame of mind on that night, and his cigar did not seem as fragrant as usual, and was thrown away, while his port must have tasted better even, for he drank more than double the customary amount.

Whatever he had gained by his visit to Ezra Vail seemed to rather please the sea lawyer, for he wended his way back into the town his face wearing a smile of apparent confidence in himself.

He stopped at the inn for tea, and was again pleased with the effort of the landlord in that direction.

Then he went to the shop of the junk-dealer, Hiram Hume.

That person was enjoying his after-supper pipe and a bottle of port, which sat on a table at hand.

He rose as his visitor entered and approached him politely, with the remark:

"Good-evening, sir; how can I serve you?"

"This is Mr. Hume, I believe!"

"It is, sir."

"Mr. Mark Monte got you to buy back his house for his sister, I believe?"

"He did, sir."

"Well, I am Mr. Monte's lawyer, and am to defend him in this trial that is to come off in a few days; but I wish to redeem certain property of his on which you gave him a loan."

"The interest I will pay you up to the end of the present month, if you will figure out just what it is, and I have here the amount loaned also."

Mr. Hume's face changed color.

He was in hopes that the valuable gem-studded frame would never be redeemed, and that would keep in his hands double the amount he had advanced on it.

"Mr. Monte better leave it with me, sir, for the time specified, for I will ask him but half the interest agreed upon, as he is in trouble," he ventured.

"No, sir, I wish to redeem it now."

"You will call, please, to-morrow, then, for I never open my iron vault at night, and it is in there," and Mr. Hume thought he saw a chance, by sitting up all night at the work, as he was a silversmith by trade, of removing some of the exquisite stones set in the frame and replacing them by inferior ones that he had on hand.

"No, Mr. Hume, I will not call to-morrow, but wait now to get the frame, for you must make an exception and open your vault to-night."

"But, sir, I—"

"But, sir, I will have an officer here within ten minutes if you do not obey me, and you seem to have forgotten that I said I was a lawyer."

The junk-dealer uttered an oath, but he got out the frame, received his money, and the sea lawyer returned to his hotel.

"Landlord, I wish a responsible man to go upon a message for me," he said.

"My son will go, sir."

"Send him to my room."

Five minutes after the landlord's son was on his way to Cliff Cottage with a package addressed to Miss Ethel Monte, and upon his return an hour after he learned that the stranger had left by a special carriage for Boston.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

WITCH WANDA'S PLOT.

WHEN Ethel Monte returned to her home, she found there Wanda, the Witch, awaiting her.

The old woman entered the cottage with Ethel, had her cup of tea and not including, it seemed, cake under the category of bread, ate several cakes that Ethel set before her, without a word that might recall the determination of the old Witch to "break bread in no one's house."

"Well, child, you went to the jail to-day," asserted, rather than asked, Witch Wanda, as Ethel took a seat near her.

"Yes, Wanda; and had a long talk with my brother."

"He agreed to be ready to escape?"

"Only after I threatened to wed Rupert Vail, should he refuse to do as you wished."

"He was stubborn?"

"He is innocent of the charge placed upon him, Wanda, and feared that to make his escape would be proof of his guilt."

"Bah! he would be hanged, rather than go; but he yielded?"

"Yes, after, as I said, I forced him to do so by my resolve to marry Rupert Vail."

"And would you do so?"

"Would I? Only too gladly, if it was to save Mark from the gallows, but for nothing else."

"Why, Wanda, Mark is as noble as any man who lives, and I owe him more than I can repay by act of mine."

"I hate, detest, abhor Rupert Vail, but I would go to the altar with him with a smile on my face if it was to save my brother's life."

"Ah, child, you have a loyal, noble heart; but now let me tell you why I came."

"Yes, Wanda."

"I was at the jail to-day, and the man I sought to find is away for ten days or so."

"He has gone off to Portsmouth to see his mother, who is very ill."

"Now, I have much influence over this man, Andre Sonora is his name, for his mother is a West Indian Creole, and his father was a Cuban sailor."

"Andre was borne in the West Indies, and is as afraid of me as he is of Satan himself, and I can make him do as I wish."

"Now, his work is night watch at the jail, and until he returns I can do nothing; but that will make little difference, as the trial will last several days, I suppose, and Mark will not be hanged for a few weeks after it."

"Oh, Wanda, you speak as though Mark were already condemned," cried Ethel.

"Just the same, for that tribe mean he shall be, cost what it may, and if Andre Sonora returns before the time he is expected, I will lose not a moment in seeing him arrange Mark's escape at once, for I want him out of those stone walls, and would have him set free even while the trial was going on, if possible."

"You are so good, Wanda."

The old hag laughed almost savagely.

"You call me good, and others call me a she-devil, a witch of Hades and all that is bad."

"To the pure, all things are pure, and that is why I seem good to you; but I am not good, no, I am as wicked as Satan himself," and the old woman broke forth in ringing laughter that could not but grate upon the ears of the young girl.

"But will not this man, Andre Sonora, you call him, get into trouble by helping my brother?"

"We must guard against that, good Wanda, for Mark will not let any one be sacrificed for him."

"Yes, I had thought of that, since you spoke of his being so particular about being thought guilty; but I will see to it that no one gets into trouble, and Andre Sonora can take care of himself, and will be able to do so, I assure you."

Ethel felt relieved at this, and soon after the weird old creature took her leave.

She cared not to be seen visiting Cliff Cottage, so she had run over in her skiff.

This skiff was known as Witch Wanda's Coffin, and by no means unappropriately so, for it was painted black, the oars being of the same sable hue and having upon the blades a white skull and crossbones painted.

Upon the stern was the same weird emblem and the model was as near like a coffin, to yet be a boat as was possible.

But either as skiff or sail boat it was stanch, and the witch was a good sailor, and trusted herself out in all weather.

In this grim craft she set out across the harbor for her home on the other shore, leaving Ethel once more to nurse her grief and her hope alone.

The next afternoon Wanda the Witch was on the wharf when the Winged Whale was preparing to sail on her mission after the Red Dove.

Those that saw her there gave her a wide berth, and the seamen on the brig eyed her with superstitious dread.

So interested was she in watching the preparations for sailing, that she stood direct-

ly in the path of Rupert Vail and his father, who were on their way to the brig.

In fact she stopped directly in front of the young captain, who did not notice her until he came up against her with a hard bump.

"Out of the way, you grandam of the devil!" cried the young captain, at the same time pushing her rudely from him.

Tripping as she stepped backward, she fell heavily, and many laughed loudly; but one man sprung forward and raised her, while he said in a kindly tone:

"I hope you are not hurt, my good woman."

"No, not hurt—*badly*—here, yes," and she put her hand upon her heart.

"Can I send you home in a carriage, for it will give me pleasure to do so."

"No, I thank you, gentleman," and Wanda gazed fixedly into the face of the one who had befriended her, and then walked away.

It was Eben Gull, Esquire, and he said, half-aloud, as he too turned away:

"That hound should have been punished for that act."

"It's a mercy to you, mate, that you didn't try to punish him, for he's iron-armed, is the young captain," a sailor near remarked, who had heard the words.

As for Wanda, she walked slowly toward the brig, as it lay at the wharf, and waving her staff over it in a mysterious way, muttered a few words in a tone so low no one heard the meaning of them.

Then she turned and walked away, while a man near remarked:

"She is casting ill-omen upon the brig."

Soon the Winged Whale cast off, and amid cheers from the crowds on shore stood down the harbor under full sail.

But many shuddered as they saw following in her wake the coffin-like skiff of Wanda the Witch, and an old white-haired seaman shook his head and muttered:

"That craft is doomed, for it sails with the curse of a witch thrown after."*

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN THE WAKE OF THE WINGED WHALE.

WANDA THE WITCH, after being so rudely shoved aside by Captain Rupert Vail, as to fall heavily as soon as she had made her weird signs over the brig Winged Whale, walked rapidly away, the crowd giving her ample room as they saw her coming toward them.

A walk of a few blocks along the harbor front brought her to a ship in which was her queer skiff.

She got into it, hoisted the little snow-white sail, and, as the brig headed down the harbor she ran into its wake, and not half a cable's length astern.

Rupert Vail stood upon the quarter-deck, busy with his vessel, and proud as a peacock at being in command.

And he had reason to be, for the Winged Whale was a beautiful vessel, her model was perfect, and her spars as symmetrical as a yacht's.

She spread a vast deal of canvas and the sails were white as snow, while her decks were in perfect condition and her hull black as ink and relieved only by a ribbon running from the high, sharp bows to her stern.

Her figurehead was a gold whale with wings, and it set off her bow very handsomely.

At her fore floated her private flag, a winged whale, in gold in a blue field, and at the maintop was the flag of the firm of Vail & Co., while from her peak fluttered the American ensign.

Her bulwarks had been pierced with ports, for broadsides of six guns, and in addition she carried three pivot long Toms, mounted forward, amidships, and aft.

Her crew of a hundred men, dressed in new togs, were busy about the decks, and her officers, selected from the whaling ships in port, as were also the crews, were upon the quarter-deck with their young captain.

Among them were several old whaler captains, glad to serve under their young commander for the cruise after the Red Dove, for it was whispered that she would be a very valuable prize, and, as a pirate craft, must be loaded down with gold.

"Curse that hag! see how she is follerin'

*It has not been more than half a century since witches and wizards were firmly believed in by many people, and even to-day the superstitious believe in them.—THE AUTHOR.

in our wake!" said Captain Skinner, who was serving as first officer, and he pointed to Wanda, the Witch.

Rupert Vail turned and beheld her, and his handsome face slightly paled as he did so.

He was going on this cruise from a secret desire he had to win fame among the people of Salem, to make of himself a hero, in fact, and there was also a desire to make Ethel Monte feel that he was a great man.

He did love the girl, after his fashion, and her rebuff but added to his desire to make her care for him.

This was his secret motive to go upon the cruise, added to which was a belief that the Red Dove would prove to be an enormously rich prize, and the love of gold was as deeply rooted in the heart of Rupert Vail as it was in that of his father.

At the remark of Captain Reuben Skinner, who had yielded command of his vessel to his owner son, and the junior member of the firm of Vail & Co., to serve as first officer, by courtesy called "lieutenant," Rupert Vail looked astern, and there beheld, not half a cable's length away, the skiff of the Witch of Salem.

Instantly he hailed, and his voice distinctly reached the woman:

"Ho! you witch of Hades, put back from following in my wake, or I'll send a shot into you!"

All breathlessly awaited reply.

It came in a mocking laugh, followed by the words:

"Your shot will miss me, Rupert Vail, and fly into the town and do red work that will hang you for murder."

This fact, that the shot would ricochet and go into the town, Rupert Vail knew, and he had only intended to frighten Wanda, but in this he had failed.

"If you do not put back I will lay to, lower a boat, and put you in irons," he shouted.

"You have not a man on your craft, Rupert Vail, who dare lay a hand on me."

"Dare it if you wish, and mark the result."

"And as for your blow upon me to-day, I warn you that it shall not be forgotten."

"Sail on, for I go my way, and dare you to bar my course."

Urged by his officers Rupert Vail said no more, for the superstitious skippers cared not to go to sea with the curse of a witch following them, for one and all on the brig, with the exception of the young captain, deemed it in the power of Wanda to do them harm at her own weird will.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

WITCH WANDA AND ETHEL.

AFTER she had sailed in the wake of the Winged Whale for half a league, Wanda, the Witch of Salem, put her coffin-like skiff about, and, to those on the brig flying seaward, and the many who saw her from the shore, seemed to be simply enjoying a sail upon the waters.

As darkness settled down upon the scene, she changed her course for the twentieth time, and with the air of one who now had a certain destination in view.

That destination was the home of Ethel Monte, Cliff Cottage.

Landing on the shore, she went up to the cottage and beheld Ethel watching the rising of the moon.

The maiden recognized her strange visitor, and said pleasantly:

"I am glad to see you, Wanda, for I had an idea you would come."

"You saw me out on the harbor, then?"

"Yes."

"You saw the brig?"

"It was the Winged Whale?"

"It was."

"Gone to find the Red Dove?"

"Yes, and hang the pirate; but it's catching before hanging, girl."

"You do not believe that the Winged Dove will catch the Red Dove?"

She may find the craft."

"But not capture her?"

"No."

"She appeared to be heavily armed and fully manned, for I saw her distinctly with my glass."

"She was both, and well officered too, while the brig is stanch and swift, and must be the superior of the Red Dove."

"Still, for all that, you do not think she will capture her?"

"I do not."

"But why, Wanda?"

"Do not be anxious, my child, for with all your trust in your sailor lover, I see that you dread he may be proven to be the commander of the Red Dove."

"Oh, Wanda, there are seemingly proofs that he is; but I will not yet give up my trust in him."

"That's right, girl: where you love, trust; do not make yourself wretched looking for flaws in a diamond you believe to be perfectly pure, but take it as it is."

"If you find flaws, then is the time to doubt its being worthy the value you set upon it."

"You give me hope again, Wanda; but where will the brig go in search of the—the pirate?"

"On the course of the whaling fleet that are coming in."

"You see they left the whaling-grounds in a bunch, and the craft of the greatest speed came to the front."

"Then they met a fearful storm and this scattered them, hurt some and delayed others, so that from the arrival of the first the other day to the last, will be all of two weeks' time, if not more."

"Yes, Wanda."

"Now this pirate has seemed to strike hard at the whalers."

"He seems to be the foe of the whalers, that is a fact."

"He is, and for some reason it would seem that causes him to like revenge more than gold, as he could get more booty elsewhere, that is certain."

"He may wish to take only money."

"So it would seem; but he has hit some of them as they have come in, and Rupert Vail will steer on their course, speaking each one of them, and thus trying to find the pirate."

"And you do not think he will capture him, though?"

"No, why should he, for the pirate has a swift craft, and if his vessel is the Red Dove she has talons and Rupert Vail may discover when too late that he has caught a Tartar."

"But you saw me in his wake, girl?"

"Yes."

"Do you know why I followed him?"

"No."

"To send after him my curse, to wish for him wild weather and bloodshed," and the woman spoke with such an intensity of hatred that Ethel fairly shuddered, and asked:

"But why do you hate him so, Wanda, and wish for him death and destruction, when he goes to destroy a pirate?"

"Why do I?"

"Yes, Wanda."

"I will tell you, if you would hear."

"I will be glad to hear, Wanda, for I knew not that Rupert Vail had harmed you."

"I went to the wharf to see the brig sail, and I love to look at vessels, at beautiful craft, for my boy is a sailor, you know, and he went away in a fine, a noble ship, and it is his house, his home on the far sea, for he has never come back to me yet, no not yet; but he will, yes, he will come some day," and the poor woman seemed to wander in the past for a moment, as she spoke of her absent sailor boy, and Ethel felt her heart bleed for her.

Then she continued:

"But I went to see the Winged Whale sail, and I was standing there thinking, when along came Ezra Vail and his son."

"I did not see them, but, musing, went against Rupert Vail, and he flung me from him with a bitter curse, and I fell."

"Yes, I fell so heavily that for a second I was stunned."

"He was cruel—he was inhuman," said Ethel, indignantly.

"He is all that is bad; but I was picked up by a man I have not seen in our town before, a stranger, and one of peculiar appearance."

"His manner was kind, his voice tender, and I heard him say the brute ought to be punished."

"But I went my way, and to make Rupert Vail's heart grow cold with awe, I followed in the wake of the brig, and you may be sure

there are men on that craft this night who wish they were ashore after they saw Wanda, the Witch, in the wake of their brave craft."

"But there comes some one, so I will hide yonder behind that bush," and Wanda slipped off of the piazza, as the little gate opened, and a man advanced along the walk toward the cottage.

CHAPTER XL.

A MYSTERY.

IN the moonlight the man came forward to where Ethel stood, having seen her as he entered the little gate.

He was a young man, and doffing his cap politely, said:

"Is this Cliff Cottage, may I ask?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you are Miss Ethel Monte?"

"I am, sir."

"I have a package for you then, Miss Monte, and it is one of value, so I was told."

"A package for me?" she asked, in surprise.

"A letter, perhaps, from my brother."

"There is a letter within the package I was told."

"May I ask who gave it to you, sir?"

"A gentleman who came to the hotel this morning."

"Here is the package, and the gentleman is at my father's inn, for I am the son of Landlord Hastings, should you wish to reply."

"Good-night, Miss Monte," and the young man departed, leaving Ethel standing with the package in her hand and wondering what it was and who could have sent it.

Then she thought of the witch, and called to her.

Wanda came forward from her hiding-place and the two entered the cottage together.

"Now, Wanda, what does it mean?" asked Ethel, after she had told the woman what the young man had said, and shown her the package.

"Open it and see, child," was the reply of Wanda the Witch who never ventured an opinion on any subject she was not certain about.

The package was some five inches in length by three in width and about two in thickness.

It was sealed and addressed:

"IMPORTANT AND PERSONAL."

"For MISS ETHEL MONTE,"

"CLIFF COTTAGE,"

"Harbor Shore."

Breaking the seal, Ethel saw a small case, and in it, when she opened it, was the jeweled gold frame of her mother's miniature.

She almost dropped it in her surprise.

It was what her brother had taken to Hector Hume to get a loan on, and which loan of money had enabled him to bury their mother decently, erect a tasteful headstone over her grave, buy back the cottage and fit it up, leaving still a good balance for her to live upon.

But why should it be sent to her?

Who could have sent it?

Of course it must have been Hume the junk-dealer, who her brother had told her had really been quite kind to him.

In her bewilderment she had thrust the frame into the hands of Wanda the Witch, and not once thought of opening the letter that came with it.

Again the witch came to her aid, when Ethel repeated:

"What does it mean?"

"Read the letter."

"Ah!" and the seal was quickly broken, and Ethel read aloud as follows:

"SALEM INN, Tuesday."

"I return to Miss Ethel Monte the miniature frame, which her brother was forced to make use of, so let her keep it in safety."

"I am her brother's friend, and am associated with Mr. Browne as his lawyer, so beg to say that there is hope that his enemies will not be able to crush him."

"I leave Salem at once, but shall return."

"With respect,"

"Miss Monte's humble servant."

"EBEN GULL."

"Well?" said Ethel, who knew not what else to say.

"Aha!" cried Wanda.

"That is the gentleman who raised me up

to-day when that brute Rupert Vail overthrew me."

"I sent a boy to find out, and he said he stopped at the Salem Inn, and his name was Gull."

"Your brother's case is in kind hands, my child."

"Yes, Wanda, but to think he should have gotten this from the money-lender; it was a very large sum to pay."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five hundred dollars and interest."

"It is strange," Wanda said, not being able to fathom it herself, that a lawyer should advance such a sum to a poor client."

"Is he a young man?" asked Ethel.

"No, his hair is silvered; but he's a fine gentleman, though he is humpbacked, and I have heard all so marked have genius of one kind or another."

"Well, if he is my brother's lawyer, I shall see him to thank him; but his deed of kindness is beyond my comprehension."

Wanda had been gazing at the jeweled frame the while, and said:

"This is a costly trinket, girl."

"Yes, indeed; but I'll get the miniature that fits into it."

She arose and left the room, but soon returned with the miniature.

"A beautiful face; but a strange device and reading on the frame—a hand of diamonds clasping a hand of pearls, and this motto—what is it?"

"*La jour viendra.*"

"French; but what does it mean?"

"*The day will come.*"

"A strange motto, and there's more in it than we can read, with the two bands of precious stones."

"It cost a small fortune, girl, and it has been a fortune to you in your need."

"Keep it safe, and if you need money, come to Wanda the Witch."

"I am not so poor as people think," and in her abrupt way, Wanda the Witch bade Ethel good-night and departed, declining to accept the hospitality of Cliff Cottage as she was urged to do.

And until late that night Ethel Monte lay awake striving in vain to fathom the mystery of the return of the gem-studded gold frame to her by Eben Gull.

CHAPTER XLI.

A WITCH AT HOME.

THE home of Wanda the Witch was across a stretch of water, on a point where stood a heavy forest at the time of which I write.

There was a hill near the shore, and against this had her cabin been built.

It was situated but a few feet from the water, and there was a small inlet in which she kept her boat.

On one side of the cabin was a vegetable garden, which she cultivated herself, there were tame ducks swimming about the inlet, chickens roaming in the woods, and a general air upon all that the witch was not uncomfortably situated.

The cabin was built of stout logs, and had a door in front and a window in either end, the latter being high up from the ground.

A huge dog, with glossy, black hide, lay upon a mat in front of the door, and was as great a terror to boys, or marauders, as was the witch.

Owing to this sable guardian, and the fear the witch inspired, Wanda had the point of land to herself, for no neighbors cared to crowd her, and growlers gave her a wide berth.

Within the cabin were two rooms, one where she slept, and other her kitchen and eating-room.

The former was quite cozy in appearance, and the latter showed that Wanda looked to her own good in the way of food.

Such was her home, and there she had lived for a long time, no one molesting her, all fearing her, while she dwelt in weird, grim solitude, waiting, watching, hoping for her son's return, her boy who had sailed away to sea in the long ago in a ship that had never come home.

After leaving Cliff Cottage, Wanda had gone to her skiff, and sailed up the harbor toward the town.

As she walked along the streets men and women looked askance at her, some drew

away and others shuddered and shunned her.

She smiled grimly at their superstitious dread, and more, she liked it.

It was a joy to her to make men and women fear her.

Her steps led her to the Salem Inn, and when she entered the well-crowded tap-room of that very fine hostelry, there was an instantaneous hush fell upon all.

Walking up to the landlord she said, quietly:

"Hugh Hastings, is there one Eben Gull, a gentleman, stopping at your inn?"

"No, good Mistress Wanda, there is not, for the gentleman departed by private conveyance for Boston an hour ago."

Without a word, to the landlord's regret, she wheeled and left the inn, for mine host would have been glad to know what Wanda the Witch wanted with his strange but very generous guest.

As Wanda went out upon the piazza, the stage from the eastward rolled up to the door, and she paused to see who had arrived.

"Suddenly she stepped forward and touched a man who had just alighted and was moving off.

He turned and started as he saw her.

"I want you, so come to the elm on the shore; I will be there," she said.

"But, Wanda, I have just returned, and—"

"I will be there, so don't fail," and the witch turned away.

The man muttered something very like a curse, but walked on down the street until he came to a small house situated back in a yard.

This he entered, but only for a few minutes, as he came out again, though no longer carrying his carpet-bag in his hand, and which he had brought with him from the stage-coach.

It was growing late and there were few in the streets, and these few he seemed to wish to avoid, for he crossed over to the side on which the moon cast a shadow.

Down the street he wended his way until he came in sight of the harbor, and then turning to the right he walked along the shore to where there stood a large elm.

"Get into my skiff, for I wish you to go home with me," said Wanda, stepping out from behind the elm and confronting him.

"My God, no!"

"Do you fear to go with me?" she asked, with a sneer.

"I fear that infernal boat."

"Bah! some day you'll get into a coffin in earnest if you are so lucky as to have one.

"Come, I have important words to say to you, and we must not be seen together."

With a sigh, he entered the skiff, the witch followed, and taking the helm she headed over to the point of land where was her home.

Neither spoke until they had landed and the woman led the way to the cabin and soon had a light burning.

"You came home sooner than you were expected, Andre Sonora," said the witch.

"Yes, my mother is dead."

"Ah! then you have lost your best friend, and you have my sympathy."

"She died sooner than we expected, and after the burial I decided to return."

"I am alone in the world now, Wanda."

"She left nothing for you?"

"Her little home, which I sold for a few hundreds in cash."

"Well, you can make more by serving me, Andre Sonora, for I have work for you to do."

"What is it, Wanda?"

"You are night watch at the jail, and there is a prisoner there whom you must aid to escape, for—"

"No, no! I cannot do this."

"You know best, Andre Sonora, whether you care to make half a thousand in money, and go elsewhere to seek a home—for you just said you had no ties now—or whether you wish me to bring ill-omen upon your future life."

"Serve me as I demand, and you get your pay, and I'll give you a charm that will protect you and bring you luck."

"Refuse, and I will blast your days with my curse."

"Which shall it be?"

The man shuddered and was silent.

His dark face and general appearance showed that he was not an American, and he came of a superstitious race, and dreaded the witch, believing in her power to harm or bring him luck, as he did in the existence of good and evil spirits.

At last he asked, in a low voice that showed a tremor of suppressed emotion and fear:

"Who is it you wish to escape, Mother Wanda?"

"A young sailor who is guilty of no crime, but is persecuted by the rich foes he has made."

"His name is Mark Monte!"

"Mark Monte?" cried the man.

"So I said."

"I need no gold to serve him, for he saw me in a foreign port, sick and penniless, five years ago, and he gave me gold, and brought me home on his father's ship; but what wrong has he done?"

"None, as I told you; but was put in the jail by Ezra Vail and his son, and they mean to hang him, too, for he is accused of mutiny and murder."

"It is false! Marke Monte never was guilty of a crime."

"So I say, and I am glad to leave him in your hands to rescue."

"Think over a plan, and when you are ready to act come to me and tell me."

"Now you can go, Andre Sonora."

Thus she dismissed him, and, after running him to the landing at the Elm, she returned to her lonely cabin, which superstition had peopled with evil spirits and idle rumor had made a perfect charnel-house to be dreaded as was the plague and grim death itself.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE WINGED WHALE ON THE SEARCH.

WHEN the Winged Whale, an amateur brig-of-war, if I may so call her, stood over close to Winter Island Point on her port tack, two sails came in sight from her decks.

One was a large brig about five miles away toward Nangus Head, and the other, a barque over three leagues distant and near Baker's Island.

With his glass Captain Rupert Vail recognized both vessels as belonging to the whaling fleet, and he headed so as to get near enough to signal them.

Night was coming on and he was anxious to speak to them both before dark.

He had gotten over his anger at the witch, and yet he could not wholly banish her from his remembrance.

He also saw that her following the brig had influenced both the officers and crew, so he was anxious to have something to break the current of their thoughts.

The breeze, blowing some eight knots, came in from the sea, and was bringing the brig and barque before it under full sail, while the Winged Whale was close hauled on the starboard tack and with her course pointed for Nangus Head.

By heading for Peach Point she could cross the bows of the incoming brig, and then go about on the port tack in time to head off the barque.

It was near sunset when she drew near enough to hail, and the quartermaster was given orders to luff close, so as to check her headway.

The brig they were meeting was large and weather-beaten, and her crew were gazing shoreward with more interest at again nearing home, than at the armed Winged Whale.

"Ahoy the Laborer!" shouted Captain Skinner in his stentorian voice, which had caused Rupert Vail to tell him to hail.

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Is not that the Winged Whale armed?" came the response.

"Ay, ay, Captain Bruner, and we are in search of the pirate Red Dove."

"You are on the right track, for he fleeced me four nights ago."

"The deuce he did!"

"He did to the tune of twelve hundred."

"Is his vessel armed?"

"No, but the Dove's got claws, though she don't show them."

"Is she under brig or schooner rig?"

"The latter when she brought me to."

"Ay, ay, thank you—what barque is that?"

"The Merry Girl. Luck to you with the pirate!" and the Laborer was too far away for further conversation.

The Winged Whale's course was now shaped so as to head off the barque, and just after sunset, they were near enough to hail.

"Ahoy, the Merry Girl!" hailed Captain Skinner, and he was promptly answered by the jovial old skipper with:

"Ay, ay, Rube Skinner, have you turned your brig into a navy craft, that you crowd her decks with bull-dogs?"

"Am in search of the pirate Red Dove, Captain Dave Hastings," answered Skinner, the skipper of the barque being a brother of the landlord of Salem Inn.

"And I pray heaven you may find the sea robber, for I want my money back."

"You saw him, then?"

"Saw him? well, yes, and felt him, too, for he cleaned my cash locker out of a cool four hundred."

A word to Captain Skinner from Rupert Vail caused his officer to shout out:

"Wear 'round, captain, and lay to, for Captain Vail commands the Winged Whale, and wishes to speak with you."

The order was quickly given, the sailors sprung to the braces, and as the large barque lay to, the nimble brig had run up close and luffed sharp into the wind.

"Ahoy, Captain Hastings! I am Rupert Vail, junior owner, you know."

"How are you, Captain Vail?"

"Glad to see you afloat on such a fine craft," shouted Skipper Hastings.

"Thank you; but I detained you to tell me all you could about the pirate craft the Red Dove?"

"It's soon told, sir; we sighted him ahead four days ago, just leaving the Laborer yonder, and we tried to run from him, as the brig signaled trouble."

"It was no use, for the craft sails like the wind and soon ran close upon us and hailed."

"I had made ready to fight, but he showed a large crew and told me he had a Dove whose claws were simply hidden under feathers, so not to make him show them."

"Then he came on board and told me he needed a loan, and, egad, I let him have it."

"He thanked me, reminded me that we had met before under two similar occasions, and one where I sat as one on a jury to try him for piracy, and then bade me good-by, telling me he would give my respects to my friends in the ships astern of the Merry Girl."

"I tell you, Captain Vail, I like that youth."

"Who is he?"

"He calls himself Captain Meredith; but if he isn't kin to the devil, then I am greatly mistaken, and you'll find that his Red Dove has claws when you strike him."

"But, all well in port?"

"Ay, ay, and you will please report me as being off Baker's Island and following your wake after the Red Dove."

"I will, sir, and I'll wager my grandmother's cat that you'll find he has been sociable with every captain of the fleet he comes up with," and with a laugh at his own facetiousness, the jolly skipper ordered the barque put once more on her course.

And once more the Winged Whale held on her way, Rupert Vail ordering a double lookout set, and giving instructions to the officer of the deck to keep on in tacks averaging three leagues, but bringing the coast in sight on each port tack.

In this way he hoped to be within sighting distance of any vessel of the whaling fleet homeward bound.

And thus through the Winged Whale held on her search for the Red Dove, whose captain and crew were to be shown no mercy—so said Rupert Vail.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE SAME "OLD STROY."

THE Winged Whale was on her port tack when dawn broke, and had the Cape lights just abeam.

The wind had begun to freshen, and she held on her course north by west, leaving Gap Head a league away to port, and was dashing swiftly along when Rupert Vail came on deck.

He glanced eagerly about him, and Skipper Abe Handy, who held the deck as second-officer, said:

"Good-morn', cap'n."

"Do you see yonder p'int o' land?"

"Yes."

"It's Andrews's P'int, and Halibut P'int lies in behind it yonder, so you knows whar we be this morn'."

"Yes, I see, and we are running well, with a fair breeze; but have you spoken any sail during the night, for I confess to having slept too well to hear anything?"

"Only a coaster or two, and yender are a lot o' 'em inshore."

"But the wind is coming round to the westward now, so we can lay a straight course, and can the better sight anything inward bound toward Salem, as they'll likely give the shore a wide berth."

"Yes, and there we get it from the west—hold her north by east, helmsman, and Captain Handy, put four men on duty aloft, for we must let nothing by us," and Rupert Vail returned to the cabin to breakfast.

The other officers were all up, for the excitement kept them from taking their rest, though off duty, and when they followed their young commander on deck they found the Winged Whale heeled well over to starboard and running along like a frightened deer.

The wind was blowing a ten-knot breeze for a good craft, but she was getting more out of it, and her canvas was drawing splendidly.

The wind now came from due west, so that she had it fair, and she was pointing north by three points west.

"Sail ho!"

The cry greeted Rupert Vail from aloft, as he stepped on deck.

"Ay, ay, aloft! Whereaway?"

"One point off the lee bow, sir, and rising rapidly."

"Ay, ay; report her as soon as you know what she is."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The brig was allowed to fall off a couple of points, so as to bring the stranger dead ahead, and at the pace she was going, they would soon know what it was they had to meet.

For half an hour the lookout hailed the deck.

"Ay, ay," responded Rupert Vail.

"The stranger is a square-rigger, sir, and standing south by west."

"Ay, ay."

"Sail ho!"

This came from another lookout, and a second sail loomed in sight, far astern of the large ship.

So the sails went on, until within six leagues as many vessels were in sight, and the Winged Whale was rushing along at a slapping pace, and within half a mile of the first one sighted.

The signals had told that she was the Bettie Brandon, whaler, out of Salem, George Holt & Co., owners, and belonged to the fleet of which the Niagara had been the flagship.

She came to at a signal from the brig, and as the latter glided slowly up within hail, Rupert Vail called out:

"Seen anything of a pirate?"

"We have that."

"When, where, and who was he?"

"Yesterday, about this time of day, some thirty leagues south by west of Cape Sable, and he was a pirate who has made it lively for whalers, as though he had a spite against us in particular."

"Ay, ay! And his name?"

"Captain Meredith, of the brig Red Dove."

"That's the man! But from whence did he come when you saw him?"

"He was on the course you are, sir."

"Ay, ay."

"Are there many of the fleet astern of you?"

"Half a score, perhaps, but I guess most of 'em are to the eastward," for we had a storm that drove us seaward."

"Thank you, Captain Holmes; but did the pirate board the vessels in sight astern of you?"

"Only two were in sight yesterday, sir, and he showed no partiality, for he ran down to them also."

"Ay, ay, we will soon bring him to account."

"I hope so, for he hits us whalers hard. But, captain?"

"Ay, ay, Captain Holmes," responded Rupert Vail.

"May I offer an old fool's advice?"

"Certainly."

"That Red Dove brig—"

"You say it was a brig?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right—he was a schooner yesterday; but what is your advice?"

"Keep a man aloft with spy-glass, and when he sights your game, go about, and hide your bull-dogs and extra men."

"Let him chase and overhaul you, and then give him a surprise by showing your teeth, and you'll need it, for that Red Dove has got talons, or I am mistaken, though she does not show them until the need comes to do so."

"Ay, ay, Captain Holmes, I will take your advice and thank you," and the two vessels parted, the Bettie Brandon to go to on her way once more toward Salem, and the Winged Whale to run down and speak the other five sail in sight.

All told the same story, so that it got to be an old one, of how the Red Dove had overhauled them with marvelous ease, and her dashing young captain had borrowed from each skipper from a few hundred dollars to a thousand, as the case might be, but never took aught else from his prize, which was then allowed to go on her way.

As the Winged Whale left the last vessel the lookout aloft hailed the deck again:

"Sail ho!"

Would this prove to be the Red Dove, the Scourge of the Sea Wings of Salem? was the question on the lips of all on board the armed pirate hunter.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE THREE BRIGS.

THOUGH it had not been sighted from the foretop of the Winged Whale, there was another sail astern of the last one that had been reported to the deck.

This sail was in a direct line with the one sighted, and some two leagues astern, and about six from the Winged Whale.

The sail in question was a brig, and as trim a one too as ever spread canvas to the breeze.

She was fairly flying along over the waters, on a course that would take her to Salem, and if not in chase of the craft ahead she certainly looked to be.

The latter was a large, lubberly brig, in comparison to her pursuer, and was making about six knots out of a ten-knot breeze.

Upon her decks were visible her crew, and their eyes were alternately fixed upon the large ship ahead, sailing southward, and the Winged Whale heading toward her.

She had seen the two vessels speak each other, and the Bettie Brandon was known as one of the whaling fleet to which she belonged.

Her skipper, a bluff old tar, said to his first mate:

"Hutchins, that craft did speak the Bettie Brandon, and she is now heading for us."

"Take the glass and go aloft and see what you make of her."

Mate Hutchins obeyed, and reported to the deck that he made her out to be the Salem messenger brig Winged Whale, and if she wasn't armed, then he didn't know a gun battery when he saw it.

The two talked over the matter, and then turned their attention to the brig astern.

"Now, yonder is another craft that is as trim as a deacon's daughter, cap'n," said Hutchins.

"Yes, and I don't like her, though she may be the craft as came as a messenger to us on the fishing-grounds, and had that handsome young captain on board who struck us skippers for a few hundreds for a special service, you remember, Hutchins."

"Yes, I remember, cap'n," and the mate turned his glass upon the stranger, and continued:

"Well, whatever she is, she just sails two knots to the one of the Dolphin."

"She does, indeed; but if she's the Red Dove, as the dashing young skipper called his craft, we have nothing to fear," returned the captain of the Dolphin.

Now, the Dolphin was the last of the Salem whaling fleet, and, since leaving the fishing-grounds, she had steadily dropped astern, for her speed was proverbially slow.

But she was large and carried a heavy cargo, and though slow was sure.

On account of being at "the last end of the procession" of the Sea Wings of Salem, Captain Zeke Torbett did not know of what had occurred in the fleet far ahead of him.

He had been twice visited by Captain Meredith for money, and had no thought of its not being a legitimate demand.

Then he had not been one of those who had heard Captain Rube Skinner's story of the piracy of the Red Dove against the Winged Whale, nor had he been at the trial of the buccaneer on board the Niagara.

He had been signaled that the fleet was ready to sail, and had answered that he was also ready, and so slow had been the Dolphin that she had kept persistently in the rear like a guard astern.

A stanch craft, however, she had weathered the storm well, and holding to her course better than many others, had crept up upon the fleet, until, when she sighted the Winged Whale speaking the Bettie Brandon she was, as has been stated, not many leagues astern.

"Look there, Cap'n Zeke," cried Mate Hutchins, and he pointed to the Winged Whale, which had suddenly gone about, as though on a pivot, and was following in the wake of the Bettie Brandon.

Of course those on the Dolphin could not understand the maneuver, and Captain Zeke Torbett's heart gladdened with him as he said:

"Lor', Hutch, we are holdin' our own with that brig, which I am sart'in is the Winged Whale."

"The old Dolphin is improvin' in her speed a leetle; but I know'd it were in her."

The old skipper was proud of his vessel indeed, and Mate Hutchins and the crew, as they watched the Dolphin holding her own with the Winged Whale, felt proud of the old craft and gave her three cheers.

Suddenly on the Winged Whale went up a signal.

It was a long way off to read signals, but Mate Hutchins said:

"She asks if this is the Dolphin."

Then came another signal, asking what craft that was far astern of the Dolphin.

Mate Hutchins responded by signal that they thought it was the messenger brig Red Dove, Captain Meredith commanding.

Then came the signal:

"This is the Winged Whale, Captain Rupert Vail, and she is armed, manned and pirate-hunting."

"Stand on as you are, but report us as a brig of the fleet, crippled by the storm."

"The vessel astern of you is a pirate, and will rob you; but we will get even with him."

Such were about the signals that came from the Winged Whale and they caused Captain Zeke and Mate Hutch to gaze at each other in alarm, and then, as of one mind, to dart down into the cabin to "splice the main brace" with a glass of grog.

CHAPTER XLV.

TRAPPER AND TRAPPED.

THE vessel astern of the Dolphin was indeed none other than the Red Dove.

She had run down to the vicinity of Salem, put about and met the fleet of whalers as they neared port, and her daring captain had demanded toll upon the high seas.

Upon her deck aft, paced her young and handsome captain.

His face was marked by no shadow, he was dressed with the same style and neatness which seemed to be his enjoyment, and between his lips was a fragrant cigar.

Not a care in the world seemed to rest upon him to judge by his handsome face and cheery manner.

His crew were also in neat uniforms, and the brig was as trim alow and aloft as a toy ship.

"Captain Meredith, that lubberly brig yonder must be the tail end of the fleet," said a young officer, who had just descended from aloft, and glass in hand approached his commander.

"Doubtless, and we passed some in the night, or they have been driven scaward,

and are now leagues away to the southward of us.

"We will overhaul that craft, Harmon, then stand southward, so as to run by those ahead, in the night, which we have boarded, and by standing off and on off Salem for a few days, we will doubtless pick up others."

"No doubt, sir; but we have done well, for you have boarded already thirty-two of the half-hundred in the fleet."

"And yonder one makes the thirty-third."

"Yes, not bad work, indeed, and a cool twenty thousand this last haul on them has netted us."

"Ho, the deck!" suddenly rung out from the foretop.

"Ay, ay, my man."

"If you will let the helmsman luff a couple of points, sir, I think I can make out a sail in line with the brig ahead, sir."

"The last one we boarded in the night, Carr."

"No, captain, this craft is nearer, and the brig ahead has hidden her until now, I am sure."

"Ay, ay, Carr," and turning to the helmsman, Captain Meredith said:

"Luff her a couple of points, helmsman!"

"Ay, ay, sir, luff it is," was the deep response, and the brig by this maneuver brought into view the Winged Whale far ahead.

"Let her come back to her course, helmsman," was the next order, after there came from aloft:

"It is a sail, sir, over a league ahead of the craft ahead, sir, and running as we are."

Officer Harmon now went aloft again with his glass, and remained for half an hour.

When he returned to the quarter-deck, he said:

"Captain Meredith, the strange craft ahead is a brig, and has a trim look; but she sails no better than that tub yonder, and in fact I think the latter is gaining upon her."

"To my eye the stranger is armed."

"All right, we must not be caught in a trap, Harmon, so see to it that we are not, and call me if there are any new developments," and the young captain went into his cabin.

An hour after his lieutenant called him on deck.

The Dolphin was running along, not half a mile ahead, and under a crowd of canvas was hardly making over six knots.

Ahead, though still in a line and hardly a league from her was the Winged Whale, also under full sail; but her topmasts had been housed, and somehow she looked like a craft that had been crippled.

Her speed was just a trifle better than the Dolphin's, showing that something was the matter with her.

The Red Dove was fairly flying through the waters, making all of twelve knots, and standing up under her tremendous spread of canvas in grand style.

There had been a change in the appearance of the decks of the Red Dove too, though it was not visible even from the decks of the Dolphin, near as she was to the pirate.

At the peak of the Dolphin floated the Stars and Stripes, and at the fore was the Salem whaling flag.

Captain Zeke Torbett and Mate Hutchins were on deck and anxious.

They had steadied their nerves with sundry visits to the cupboard in the cabin where the grog was kept, and they and their crew awaited the Red Dove's overhauling them.

They had faith in the pretended crippled brig ahead, and were rejoicing at the fact that the Red Dove would soon feel the force of the Winged Whale's blow.

"The Winged Whale will harpoon that Red Dove in a manner that will surprise her, Hutch," said Captain Zeke.

"She will for a fact, Cap'n Zeke," was the confident reply, and the same opinion seemed to be entertained forward among the crew.

"Now, don't she sail like a witch, cap'n?"

"She does, Hutch."

"I never believed a craft could drive through the water like that; but she's got a sail there on the foremast that just hides her whole deck aft, and I never seen one fit like it."

"Nor I; but how in thunder does the man at the wheel see how to steer?"

"Give it up."

And it was no wonder, for the main foreyard was of enormous length, and the sail that fell from it went far off over either bulwark of the brig, for the wind had veered around, and was now blowing fresh out of the northwest, so that the three vessels got it almost aft.

This sail, which had excited the wonder of those on the Dolphin, fell almost to the very deck of the Red Dove, and shut out the view aft from forward.

A few more minutes passed, and then came the sharp, clear ringing of a bugle:

"Brig ahoy! what brig is that?"

"The Dolphin, Captain Zeke Torbett, whaler out of Salem, homeward bound!" was the professional and prompt response of Mate Hutchins.

"Ay, ay, I'll board you!" was the reply.

"What craft is that?" yelled back the mate of the Dolphin to this self-invited response to his hail.

"The Red Dove, tax collector of the seas. Steady as you are, and no nonsense."

As Captain Meredith spoke, the sharp bows of the Red Dove were just up with the lee quarter sail of the Dolphin, and as they touched, grappels were thrown, and the daring captain leaped alone upon the deck of the whaler.

At the same instant, drags were thrown out astern to slacken the Red Dove's speed, and an officer, following his captain, sprang to the wheel of the Dolphin.

"That officer will relieve you, helmsman, so as to steer with the man at my wheel, and we will not lose headway," said Captain Meredith, and the man at the wheel of the Dolphin yielded to the officer from the Red Dove, who at once gave his orders, which were passed back to the quartermaster at the pirate's helm.

"Pardon me, Captain Torbett, for my unceremonious visit; but it is better than losing headway, and my crew understand their business, for we have had practice," and Captain Meredith spoke with the air of a man who was conferring a favor by his words.

"What the deuce do you mean, sir, by boarding me in this style, I should like to know?" said Captain Zeke Torbett, angrily, and but for the fact that he saw it would be madness, he would have sprung upon the daring young boarder of the Dolphin, for the whaler skipper, as all whalers are, was a man of undaunted pluck.

"My dear Captain Torbett, I have you on my list as one from whom to collect taxes, and, as I have not slighted the others of the fleet I must not you."

"You are the same young feller that got money from me twice on the cruising grounds?"

"The same, sir."

"Are you a pirate?"

"My dear captain, I pray you not to shock my sensitive nature by such awful names."

"I am a tax-gatherer of the seas."

"That means a pirate, and nothing more."

"Well, captain, we will not quarrel about a name; but I wish from you just five hundred dollars, that is all."

"I'll see you in Heaven first."

"My dear sir, either pay me that money, or I set your vessel on fire, and leave you to find your way home in your boats."

"Hutchins, get the bloody pirate the money, if he will go then."

"Now, Captain Torbett, do I look like a bloody pirate?"

"But I will let you go on your way, when you pay me my tax."

Mate Hutchins came out of the cabin with the money, the young outlaw took it with a smile of thanks, raised his hat, called to his officer to follow, and the two sprang back upon the Red Dove, which immediately fell off to leeward and began to forge ahead.

"Captain Torbett, what craft is that ahead?" called out Meredith.

"Go and find out," was the sulky response.

"Thank you, I will—watch me do so," was the pleasant rejoinder, and the Red Dove shot on past the Dolphin as though the latter had been at anchor.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE "DOVE" AND THE "WHALE."

THE phenomenal speed of the Red Dove, in overhauling the Dolphin as she had, had

been the surprise of Rupert Vail and all on board, excepting Captain Skinner and his immediate crew, who remembered how the fleet craft had chased and captured the Winged Whale upon a former occasion.

"Why, the craft fairly flies," said officer Handy.

"Yes, and she will take the place of the Winged Whale as a messenger brig," remarked Rupert Vail, who already felt sure of his prize.

"Cap'n, that Dove hain't harpooned yet," ventured Skinner suggestively.

"She soon will be: but see, she has run aboard the Dolphin."

All saw the maneuver, so skillfully executed, which put the Red Dove's commander on board of the Dolphin.

"What in thunder kind o' sail is that she's got forward?" cried officer Handy.

No one knew, but all saw that it hid the brig's deck from view aft of the foremast.

"That was a clever caper," officer Skinner said, as he saw that the Dolphin had been boarded, and the two vessels were still sailing in their course, though fast together.

All on the Winged Whale noted how short a time the Red Dove was alongside of the Dolphin, and then saw her shoot by in chase of themselves.

"Now we'll give him a surprise," said Rupert Vail, and he gave orders for the men who were lying hidden to be ready at a moments' call.

Oil casks on board the whaler had been brought on deck and were so arranged as to completely hide the guns, causing her to appear as though having a heavy deck load of oil.

The topmasts had been housed, and all done to have the brig look crippled, and to check her speed there were ropes dragging forward over the bows.

Rupert Vail never felt so proud in his life before, as he did when the Red Dove came on past the Dolphin and headed after him under a pressure of canvas that forced her through the waters wonderfully fast.

"He's got a new wrinkle in that fore square-sail there, Captain Skinner, and we must learn what it is, as I know of nothing else that could drive a craft at the speed with which she comes on."

"She does sail, Cap'n Vail, at a rate I never seen equaled and that's a fact; but shall we begin to clear up the decks a leetle?"

"No, for all the casks and the tops that have been sawed off and placed over the guns, can be thrown overboard in a few minutes, while you forget that we are going to trap her, and she is not armed, I feel sure."

"I'm not so sart'in of that, sir, for she looks like one as has claws, and you remember she showed 'em to Captain Jubal when she wanted to get her captain out of his clutches."

"Well, she won't have time to get her guns on deck after she runs into my trap, and as to her crew carrying us by boarding, it cannot be done."

"All right, sir. I'll stand by to strip the whale to her fightin' pins the moment you give the word; but I wish our crew had had a leetle more practice with the guns."

"I wish so too; but we must have yonder craft, captain, come what may."

Thus half an hour passed, and then the Red Dove was not more than half a mile away, and coming on in the same wonderful manner.

"Now spring your trap, lads, and we've got her!" cried Rupert Vail, and with a cheer the men sprang to work, the casks and "dummies" were thrown into the sea, the decks were cleared for action in an instant, and the guns were run out, while, wearing suddenly around, her broadside poured a storm of iron upon the coming Red Dove, now only a few cable-lengths away.

But hardly had the guns been discharged, when down with a run came the queer foresail of the pursuer, and to the horror of all on board the Winged Whale, they beheld an armed deck and a large crew to man the guns.

The Red Dove had trapped the trapper by showing the talons and beak of a bird of prey.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE BATTLE OF THE BRIGS.

To say that Rupert Vail, and all else on board of the Winged Whale were astounded, would be to express the situation very mildly, when they discovered that they had "caught a Tartar," or in other words had been entrapped where they had hoped to trap.

There was the beautiful brig, no longer hidden by the large and queer sail forward, and her decks had a heavy battery, and it was manned by a large crew.

Forward, the moment the strange sail had been lowered, a long pivot-gun had been run into position, and along each broadside was a row of three guns of certainly larger caliber than any the Winged Whale carried, while aft the match of the forward pivot thirty-two was mounted.

Thus the secret of the queer sail was out, for it had hidden the armed deck astern of it, and the working of the crew to arm their craft by raising the guns, ready mounted, out of the hold, and which experience had taught them to do rapidly and in a masterly manner.

At the broadside of the Winged Whale the Red Dove, which had shown no colors, now sent up to the fore the blue field with its red dove, and to the peak the flag with a black field and a globe of gold, representing the world as its empire for the search of gold.

The lighter sails of the Red Dove were quickly taken in, and in a very few moments she was stripped for action.

The remark of Captain Rube Skinner, that he wished the crew of the Winged Whale had had more practice with the guns, was shown to be just, for not a shot touched the Red Dove.

"Curse it, men! do you intend to sink your iron?"

"Yonder is your target, so let her have it!" yelled Rupert Vail, who, to give him full credit, though taken by surprise was now cool and full of grit, and meant to fight his vessel to the bitter end.

The guns were loaded and fired again, but with little better result.

"Give those men double allowance of grog all round, and see if it will improve their eyesight," cried Rupert Vail, as he saw the Red Dove rushing down upon him, and still unhurt.

To the surprise of all, the Red Dove had not returned the fire, but her men were seen at her guns, and she was all ready for action.

"Now let her have it!" came from Rupert Vail, as the Winged Whale sheered so as to bring her starboard broadside to bear.

The broadside was delivered, gun by gun, and a crash came as one shot struck the Red Dove, while the foretopmast was also cut away.

A yell broke from the whalers.

Their gunners were improving.

But their joy was shortlived, for having received three broadsides from her foe, without striking back, the Red Dove's pivot replied; then, falling off, one, two, three shots came from her starboard broadside, and luffing up quickly, one, two, three, came the port guns, with but a few seconds' time between each discharge.

The loud roar of the pieces proved that they doubled the caliber of the Winged Whale's battery, and where the pivot had been double-charged with grape and canister, the broadsides had poured in solid shot.

The result upon the Winged Whale was fatal, for the shower of small shot had cut down many of her crew, while the solid shot had cut away her foremast and bowsprit, and dismounted two guns.

Then came a lull, an appalling one, on board the armed whaler, and a voice rung out like a trumpet:

"Winged Whale ahoy!"

"Do you lower your flag?"

"No!" shouted Rupert Vail, desperately.

"Fire away, my lads, and bring them to terms!"

The order was heard on board the Winged Whale, whose guns replied; but they were drowned by the roar of the pivot of the Red Dove, once more double-loaded with grape and canister, and next came the solid shot from the broadside guns and the armed whaler was almost a wreck, while her foe was right upon her, threatening evil and

veering to round her and lay alongside for boarders.

In fact there came the ringing command:

"Boarders ahoy!"

Rupert Vail was in despair.

Captain Handy, his second officer lay dead at his feet, and Rube Skinner was bleeding from two wounds, but how serious they were he did not know.

Another officer had lost a leg, the surgeon had been killed, and he saw that his crew had suffered terribly, while three of his guns were dismounted and his foremast and bowsprit cut away.

In comparison there came the Red Dove seemingly unhurt, and her men, cutlass and pistol in hand were ready to board.

There was but one thing to do and he did it.

He hauled down his flag.

And not a moment too soon, for the sharp bowsprit of the Red Dove came poking over his taffrail and Captain Meredith sprung on deck, followed by half a hundred men.

The crew were in white, giving them a spectral appearance, with black belts and red skull-caps, and they looked as neat as yachtsmen on a pleasure cruise.

Meredith was dressed in blue, trimmed with white and gold, and a brass helmet with a crimson plume sheltered his head.

His cutlass was long-baded, keen, and the hilt was of gold, studded with precious stones, while the two pistols in his belt were gold mounted.

A white sash encircled his waist, and he looked indeed the Dandy Sailor.

"Do you command here, sir?" he asked politely of Rupert Vail, who answered sullenly:

"I did."

"Of course you have surrendered?"

"You saw me haul down my flag."

"True, and you have my sympathy for having to do so; but you were wise, to spare more valuable lives."

"This is the armed messenger brig of the Salem whaling fleet, the Winged Whale, I see?"

"It is."

"And you are—"

"Rupert Vail, owner and captain."

"Ah, yes, and you was in search of me, I suppose?"

"And found you," was the grim response.

"Well, Captain Vail, I will clear your decks of the wreck, take you in tow, and, as we run toward Salem we can arrange our business, and look after your dead and wounded."

"The deuce! do you intend to tow me to Salem?"

"Of course."

"A pirate?"

"Who said I was a pirate, sir?" was the indignant question.

"Your own deeds."

"Ah, yes, my having gathered tax from your fleet, causes you to think that."

"But let us lose no time, sir."

"I am in your hands, Sir Pirate."

"My name, sir, is Meredith, Captain Meredith, and if you do not wish to be transferred from the deck of your own vessel to the yard-arm of mine, you will be more particular how you address me in future."

One look into the face of the young commander, and Rupert Vail saw that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A MYSTERIOUS FOR.

HAVING BEEN WARNED, Rupert Vail said with more politeness than he had shown before:

"May I ask what your intentions are regarding my vessel and crew?"

"In good time, sir, you shall know; but first I shall look to your wounded, for we are not inhuman, sir."

"Then I shall have my men cut away your wreckage, and taking you in tow, head for Salem, and, if you are a gambler, Captain Vail, I will wager I outsail yonder whaler, the Dolphin, even with the Winged Whale in tow."

"Will you take the wager, sir?"

"Anything from one to twenty thousand."

The man surprised Rupert Vail, and half entering into his humor, he said:

"Yes, if you carry no sail on the Winged Whale."

"Not a stretch of canvas, sir."

"What shall the amount be?"

"Five thousand."

"Agreed; but let me ask you to be my guest, while my men are setting your ships to rights."

Rupert Vail looked upon this as a polite way of telling him he was a prisoner, and he accompanied the Red Dove's captain on board of his own vessel.

As they entered the cabin of the Red Dove, they observed the Dolphin coming along under full sail, and holding a course that would bring her within pistol-range of the two vessels.

"She will pass us soon," said the merchant captain.

"Yes, and the chances are you will win your bet."

"The race is to an anchorage in Salem Harbor?"

"Not exactly, sir; but to an imaginary line between Nangus Head and Winter Island Light," was the smiling reply.

Captain Rube Skinner having been found to have only two slight wounds, was invited into the cabin of the Red Dove, and he and his captain gazed about them in surprised admiration.

Had they entered the boudoir of a princess they could not have been more surprised.

The carpet was of Persian manufacture, and soft as velvet, there were ottomans of silk, divans of velvet, a table of rare workmanship, and a cover on it that was worth a small fortune.

The woodwork of the cabin was of snow-white, gold and blue-trimmed, with heavy silk curtains over the large stern ports.

There was a desk of rare woods, inlaid with gold and silver, a case of books in half a dozen languages, a Spanish guitar, a flute with gold keys, a bugle of silver, and a number of exquisite paintings and sketches hung about in profusion.

On each side of a gangway was a state-room, and the door of one being opened, it was seen to be finished in the same gorgeous manner as was the large and palatial cabin.

In brackets on either side of the companionway were arms of various kinds and nations, helmets, armors that shone like silver, a shield, and numerous souvenirs of foreign lands.

"Balzac, wine and refreshments for these gentlemen, my guests," said the Red Dove's captain, as a negro in Turkish costume met them.

The black bowed and disappeared through the gangway, and soon returned with a silver waiter, on which were decanters and sweetmeats.

These were handed to the two guests, and Captain Meredith said politely:

"Your health, gentlemen, and to our next meeting, be it in friendship or battle," and the face of Captain Meredith was as cheerful as though he was really entertaining beloved friends in his cabin.

Then, bidding the two officers make themselves at home, he went on deck.

The Dolphin was just abeam, and Captain Torbett and Mate Hutchins were gazing at the pirate and her prize in wonder.

"Lordy! but don't that beat all?" said Mate Hutchins.

"It does, for the pirate hain't scratched, that I kin see, and the Winged Whale is a perfect wreck."

"I'd hail 'em, if I wasn't afraid he'd send a broadside into us."

And so the Dolphin glided by wholly unnoticed, and not daring to hail.

The crew of the Red Dove soon set things aright on board the prize, the wreckage was cleared away, after the wounded had been looked after, and the whaler was taken in tow.

Then sail was set on the Red Dove, and she moved away on the course of the Dolphin, now a couple of leagues ahead.

It was dark now, and as the Red Dove sped along, towing the wreck, the dead were sewn up in hammocks and cast into the sea, and Rupert Vail had no idea how heavy had been his loss until he saw body after body go overboard.

The sea was by no means rough, and as the wind was strong, the Red Dove did her double work well.

Supper was served in the cabin, and the officer prisoners were all invited to the table

of their captor, and they could not but enjoy the very tempting meal which Balzac set before them, especially as it was washed down with wines fit for a king.

After the supper cigars were passed around, and the officers looked with wonder at their mysterious captor.

He told pleasant stories, sung them a few songs, accompanying himself on the guitar, and even Rupert Vail lost his sullen mood before him.

The latter was asked to share one of the state-rooms on board of the Red Dove, while his officers returned to their own quarters on board the Winged Whale.

"Now, Captain Vail, we will settle the business between us," said Captain Meredith, turning to his prisoner when the two were left alone together.

"I cannot understand, sir, what business we can have to settle."

"Ah! let me explain."

"I am a taxgatherer of the sea, you know."

"In other words, a lawless rover."

"I said nothing about being a lawless rover, my dear sir; but my remark was that I was an ocean taxgatherer, and your tax to me amounts to just five thousand dollars."

"Sir!"

"Is it too little?"

"Do you mean the bet we made?"

"Oh, no, for that is to be paid when lost, or won."

"Now, I do not expect you brought much gold in your lockers, so I will say that when our bet is decided, if you win, I will pay you five thousand dollars; but if you lose, you will give me a due-bill for just ten thousand dollars on demand at your office."

"Gladly, if you will make it on a *personal* presentation of my note of hand for payment," and the eyes of the merchant captain glittered wickedly.

"Certainly, sir; I will present it *in person*," was the cool response.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FOR HATRED'S SAKE.

WHEN the sun arose the next morning the Dolphin was but a mile ahead of the Red Dove and her tow.

The wind was blowing steadily, but strong, and the sea had worked up into rough waves.

The large Dolphin, broad-beamed and heavy, forged through them, scattering the spray upon all sides.

She still carried full canvas, and was making better time in the rough waters and with the strong wind than she had done the day before when running from the Red Dove.

The latter vessel hung like a bloodhound in her wake, and had taken in some of her lighter sails.

She cut through the large waves like a knife, scattered no spray, and her decks were dry.

The slight damage done to her by the fire of the Winged Whale had been repaired, and she had been so fortunate as not to lose a man killed or wounded.

To the surprise of Rupert Vail and his officers and crew when they came on deck, the former on the Red Dove the others on their vessel, they saw that the beautiful vessel was no longer armed.

Her splendid battery had mysteriously disappeared below decks under the darkness of the night.

The Winged Whale, with only one mast standing, and that stripped of canvas, was towing easily, held by two cables.

A man, one of the Red Dove's crew held her wheel, and steered her most skillfully, to get all that was possible out of her, that his captain might win the bet which both crews now knew of.

But for the fact of the increased wind and heavy sea, the bet would already have been won for the Red Dove, for the beautiful vessel had steadily gained, as it was, upon the Dolphin.

The crew of the prize had not been put in irons, but had been left free, and this fact they appreciated; but upon her quarter-deck was officer Harmon of the Red Dove and a dozen seamen all heavily armed, while the men of the Winged Whale had been disarmed.

As Rupert Vail stepped on deck he took in the situation quickly, and it struck him

at once that he was in danger of losing his bet.

He looked astern at the Winged Whale and saluted his officers with a wave of the hand.

He saw that the brig was not hurt, save in her crew, guns and spars.

The Red Dove he could not find a scar of the combat on.

Captain Meredith came forward and greeted him pleasantly, while he asked if he had rested well during the night.

"I hardly think I should have done so, had I not felt sure of winning my bet."

"Why I never saw such a vessel as you have, Captain Meredith, and I may add that I never met such a man as is her commander," he added with a smile.

"Yes, we are a strange pair; but I may as well tell you now, sir, that when I run into Salem Harbor to-night, I shall release you and your vessel, for you can either tow in with your boats, or the Dolphin can carry you in when she comes up, though she'll be several hours astern."

"I believe you; but you are to release my vessel, myself and crew, do I understand you?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your booty?"

"The tax of five thousand I claim of you."

"But you will only have my I O U for that."

"Very true, but you will not dishonor your signature, I feel assured."

"A note given under enforcement is not binding."

"What force do I use, sir, for I will release your vessel at any rate; but I would hold you for the payment did I doubt it."

"I will pay it, sir, when you demand it *personally* of me in my office."

"Very well, sir, I shall call in person."

"May I ask, Captain Meredith, why you dog our vessels?"

"Do you refer to your own vessels, sir, or the entire Sea Wings of Salem?"

"All of the whaling fleet, for I have heard of your attacking no other vessels."

Captain Meredith's handsome face clouded for an instant, and it was a few moments before he replied.

"Captain Vail," he said in a deep, serious voice, different from his usual bantering, light tone: "my motive in attacking the whaling fleets of Salem is for hatred's sweet sake."

"Years ago a relative of mine went to Salem to live, and enemies of his began a bitter persecution of him."

"He was a whaler, and his vessel was the fleetest of the Sea Wings out of Salem, and his profits were larger than all others."

"But his home was burned one night, and on the fishing-ground with the fleet some enemy scuttled his fine ship and she went down."

"He lost his all, I may say, but went back to Salem and began again."

"Soon after he was accused of smuggling, arrested and thrown in prison."

"He escaped, and went elsewhere and got command of a fine schooner; but it became known by his bitter foes, and a fleet whaling-vessel, armed and manned by whalers, went in chase of him and his schooner was captured, he was taken back to Salem, tried for piracy and executed on the gallows."

"Now do you know why I have made whalers pay the debt they owe me? and I tell you, Captain Rupert Vail it is not paid yet."

"Come, let us go to breakfast, and to-night I will land you in Salem."

And Captain Meredith kept his word, for the Red Dove and her tow ran in leagues ahead of the Dolphin, and the prize, with her boats out ahead pulled for an anchorage, while the outlaw brig stood out to sea again.

CHAPTER L.

THE RETURN.

WORDS cannot picture the excitement in the good town of Salem, when the next morning the people awoke to find the last one of the whaling fleet at anchor in the harbor, for the Dolphin had arrived just before dawn.

But this was not the whole cause of the excitement, for there was a greater cause still, as off the shore, at anchor, was the Winged Whale.

She had but one mast, her bowsprit was gone, the bulwarks were shattered and three of her guns lay dismounted upon her decks.

Then too there were cruel looking scars in her sides and upon her decks, but worse still twenty of her gallant crew, who had sailed forth in hope, had gone to their graves in the deep, and as many were wounded.

All on board had a sad look in their faces, and their commander had been put ashore in the night and walked through the darkness, to his home.

Ezra Vail always sat up late; but since the sailing of the brig with his son on board, in chase of the Red Dove, he had retired even later than was his wont.

When one o'clock came he was taking his "night cap" of brandy and water, when he heard a quick step upon the piazza, and then the knocker rose and fell with a sharp clang.

He had recognized the step, and hastening to the front door admitted his son.

"Thank God you are back again; but you made quick work of the pirate I warrant you."

A bitter laugh was the reply, and not until he had dashed off a stiff drink of brandy and thrown himself into an easy-chair before the fire, did Rupert Vail reply.

"He made quick work of me."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, he is the deuce, and withal a good fellow, too."

"Do you mean to say you met him and did not capture him?"

"That is just what I mean, father, with a word added—he *captured us*."

Old man Vail sprung to his feet, seized the brandy and drank double his usual amount before he replied.

He wanted this drink for an "eye-opener."

"I will tell you just what happened," and the story was told.

Ezra Vail grew livid. He knew his son and felt that no man could have done better than he.

He was well aware of the splendid qualities of the Winged Whale, and he had picked his own officers himself, and told them to pick their men.

There was everything to be said in favor of captain, ship and crew.

The surprise too had been in their favor, and Ezra Vail was convinced that it all lay with the remarkable commander of the Red Dove and his matchless brig and men.

"The man is a devil, as you say, my son; but he treated you well after all."

"He did, sir; he is every inch a gentleman and a seaman."

"But do you think he will come for his ten thousand?"

"I am sure he will."

"Of course you do not intend to pay it?"

"I must, for I am pledged to that."

"And then?"

"Oh, then I will see that Captain Meredith never leaves Salem alive."

"Give me your hand, my boy."

"Now I can sleep, and we'll talk it all over to-morrow."

"Good-night and God bless you."

Thus parted father and son to meet in the morning at breakfast, and Rupert Vail said sullenly:

"Will *she* not laugh at me?"

"Ethel Monte?"

"Yes."

"Her brother is too near the gallows for her to be much amused, for the trial will begin in four days as I had it adjourned to await your return."

And this it was, the return of the Winged Whale, and what her crew had to tell, that caused the good people of Salem to be in a ferment.

CHAPTER LI.

STILL TRUE.

ETHEL MONTE was just finishing her breakfast, when she saw through the window the weird skiff of Wanda the Witch standing across the harbor and heading for the landing of Cliff Cottage.

She had seen the whaling fleet return, and she was always glad to see the harbor filled with vessels, and took great pride in the "Sea Wings of Salem," as the numerous ocean flyers were called.

Rising from the table, she went out into

the yard to meet Wanda, who she felt had news.

Anxious she certainly was for her brother's fate, and her lover she had not heard of since his mysterious departure from the cottage, and which had implied guilt on his part.

She knew that in the unknown lawyer, Eben Gull, Esquire, she and Mark had a friend, as also in Wanda the Witch and Constable Cassidy, the latter having been several times to see her.

She had heard that the incoming whalers had met the Red Dove to their sorrow, and also that the Winged Whale was in hot chase.

Wanda soon landed and made her way at once to the spot where Ethel stood, and from whence she could view the harbor.

"Good-morning, Wanda; any news?" she asked eagerly.

"Do you see the brig?"

"The pi—Red Dove, I mean?"

"No, the Winged Whale."

"Has she returned?"

"Yes."

"And her prize?"

Wanda the Witch laughed.

It told much however, for Ethel said:

"She did not capture the Red Dove then?"

"No, she got captured," and the Witch laughed almost wildly.

Ethel knew her peculiar ways, so said nothing, and Wanda soon told her story, all of which she had down pat.

"Ah! but Rupert Vail is mad."

"Why he never comes down early to his office, but he and the old man are there, and they look as though they could kill every one they meet."

"I tell you, Ethel, it was grand, to have Rupert Vail caught by the man he went to catch."

"I talked with the men, and what tongues gold would not loosen why fear would, and so I got it all."

"Each told the same story, and they all speak of the pirate as a real hero; but that is not all."

"Well, Wanda, I am deeply interested in all you tell me."

"I got hold of the servant of Rupert Vail, or rather the seaman who acted as such."

"He went with him on board the Red Dove, and he says that the pirate vessel is fitted up as grandly as a king's palace."

"He also says that the captain made a bet with the pirate that he could not reach Salem Harbor, with the Winged Whale in tow, before the Dolphin."

"The bet was for five thousand dollars and the pirate won."

"And more, his tax, as he called it, was the same amount, and Rupert Vail gave his I O U for the two amounts."

"How strange!"

"But there is more to tell, for Felix, the sailor servant, heard Rupert Vail ask the pirate why he dogged the Salem whalers as he did?"

"And his reply?"

"That he did it for sweet hatred's sake, and he went on to tell how his father had come to Salem, years ago to settle, but an enemy had persecuted him until he ruined him, for his home was burned, his vessel sunk, and he was thrown into prison as a smuggler."

"But he escaped, and while captain of a schooner was hunted down by Salem whalers and hanged as a pirate."

"How infamous!" exclaimed Ethel.

"Yes, and the son is getting his revenge, and revenge is sweet, it is said."

"But who was this man?"

"I know of the case, and people were sorry they had misjudged the man afterward, as they found out that they had, I have heard."

"His name was Malcolm—"

"Malcolm!" echoed Ethel, turning pale.

"Yes, that was his name, and he sent his family away, when he found his life was hounded so."

"Malcolm," said Ethel again, and she spoke as to herself.

"Yes, and your lover's first name was Malcolm, was it not?"

"Yes, Malcolm Meredith."

"Poor girl."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you still doubt that your lover is the pirate, Ethel?"

"I do, for I still have trust in him."

"The man, Felix, whom I talked with, met Captain Meredith here often, and he says he is the pirate."

"I cannot believe it."

"Did you notice that the whalers coming in met the Red Dove at the time she ran in here, when he came to see you?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"And he is aboard now and the fleet have nearly all met him?"

"True."

"He left you for a long while, never wrote, and the whalers say that his vessel was cruising about on the fishing-grounds."

"Very true."

"Can two men be so alike, as your lover and this pirate? and more, his name is the same and his vessel too, so constructed that he can change it from a brig into a schooner."

"Ah, child, I only speak that you may expect the worst, and not nurse your love more and more to have it hurt you deeper in the end when the truth must come out," and Wanda the Witch spoke in a manner that showed real emotion and which Ethel had never seen her exhibit before.

"I trust him, Wanda, for I cannot believe I could have loved so unworthily."

"Wait yet a while, and I will decide what I shall do; but you have heard that Andre Sonora the night watch at the jail has returned?"

"Yes, and I have seen him, and he will do as I ask, not only for me, but because your brother befriended him once in the West Indies, I believe."

"I am glad at least that brother Mark will not be made to suffer, and it is because of the base charge against him that I still hold faith in Captain Meredith."

"Then, too, you just told me that Captain Meredith told Rupert Vail, his father had been hanged for piracy and was innocent."

"True, very true, and I hope your lover may prove his innocence also."

"But let me tell you that the trial begins on Monday next."

"So soon?"

"Yes, and it is best to have it over."

"You will be called as a witness; but that good lawyer will be your friend, and I will be there, and woe unto the man who brings a tear to your pretty eyes, for he will have Wanda, the Witch to remember," and with an ominous look in her dark, flashing eyes the strange woman turned without another word and walked back to her skiff.

CHAPTER LII.

THE LAW-BREAKER.

It was the second day after the return of the Winged Whale as almost a wreck, and the excitement in Salem was still at fever heat.

Of course the return of the many vessels of the whaling fleet, and their crews, made the town most lively; but then there were the thrilling episodes of the cruiser to talk of, and the strange story of the Red Dove was upon every lip.

Then, too, the trial of the prisoner, Mark Monte, was to come off on the following Monday, and that was a never-ending theme of conversation.

It came on to rain in the early morning, but that did not dampen the ardor of the citizens of that seaport, for knots of sailors and townspeople stood about on the corners discussing what had occurred and what was about to happen on the following week.

A small craft that had the appearance of what was known along the coast as a "smuggler-chaser," ran into the harbor toward noon, and dropped anchor off the long wharf of Ezra Vail & Co.

She carried one gun mounted forward, and the United States flag floated from her peak, while upon her deck were a couple of officers and a dozen men.

The small boat at the stern-davits was lowered as the little vessel came to an anchor, and excepting her jib the rest of her sail was left standing.

Into the boat stepped an officer and two men, and it was pulled rapidly shoreward.

The officer was in uniform, wore a heavy

cloak to shelter him from the storm, and his hat was drawn down far over his eyes.

He wore also a full beard, a rarity in those days, and looked like a man who held high rank in the navy.

Landing at the wharf stairs, he was met by Captain Skinner, who, recognizing a Government boat, was very polite to the officer.

"I desire, sir, to communicate with Captain Rupert Vail, who I learn commanded an armed whaler in chase of the pirate craft Red Dove of late," and the officer looked at a paper he held in his hand as though getting his points from it.

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir, I will conduct you to his private office up the street," said Captain Skinner, who wore his left arm in a sling, and who was glad to be the first one to meet the naval officer.

"Thank you, sir," and the man in the cloak followed Captain Skinner, who went to the street on which was the rear end of the large warehouse of Vail & Co., and where the office was located.

The Vails loved their comfort even in business, and both father and son had their respective offices, and they were furnished with considerable luxury.

To the door of Rupert Vail's office Captain Skinner led the officer and knocked.

"Come in."

In they went, and Captain Skinner said: "Captain Vail, this gentleman is a naval officer, sir, and has come about the Red Dove affair."

"I am glad to meet you, sir."

"My name is Vail," said Rupert, with marked courtesy.

"And mine is Roamer, sir, Captain Roamer of the Sea Service."

"Be seated, Captain Roamer, and throw off your cloak and bat."

"No, thank you, for I have not a minute to remain, and if you will pardon me, I will keep them on."

"Do you wish this gentleman to remain, sir, for my business with you is of an unpleasant nature."

"Captain Skinner, please leave us alone, sir," said Rupert Vail, wondering what his visitor meant, and the squelched whaler captain retired, muttering something not to be heard by ears polite.

"Captain Rupert Vail, may I ask if you had Government authority, sir, for arming a vessel, manning her and putting to sea as a cruiser?" suddenly asked the stranger.

Rupert Vail started.

He had never thought of his act as an illegal one.

Had he committed a crime against the laws of his land by arming the Winged Whale?

"My dear sir," he said, in real alarm.

"You surprise me, indeed, for I knew not that Government authority was necessary, and—"

"You will find to your cost, sir, that it was; but I wish not to be severe, Captain Vail, and—pray give orders that you wish not to be disturbed."

Rupert Vail stepped to the office door and gave orders that no one was to come near his room until he called for some one.

Then he locked the door and said somewhat anxiously:

"You were saying, Captain Roamer—"

"Yes, that I do not believe a man of your position in life would willingly commit crime, for so the law puts it, and it is punishable both by imprisonment and a fine."

"My God!" and the sweat broke out in beads upon his forehead at the dread of imprisonment.

"Three years, I think, is the limit; but as such matters are left to my discretion, I believe you, being a rich man, would rather pay the—"

"Gladly, sir, gladly; any sum rather than go to prison."

"I thought so, Captain Vail, and I will use my discretionary powers in your case, so if you wish to pay me the five thousand I will—"

"At once, sir, at once."

"I will write you a check."

"I could not use a check, and in fact wish to get some Government vouchers for pay, cashed in town, if you would be so kind."

"Certainly, sir, you have but to name the amount, for we frequently cash vouchers."

"I will send to the bank and get the money at once."

Captain Roamer stepped over to the window and glanced at some papers he took from an inner pocket.

"Suppose you send for fifteen thousand, please, for it will not be more."

"Certainly," and writing a check for the amount, Rupert Vail left the office and sent a clerk to the bank.

The clerk returned in a few minutes, while Captain Roamer sat at the desk writing out a "release," as he called it, for Rupert Vail for what he had been guilty of.

Taking the money from the clerk the merchant-captain ran over it and said:

"Here is the amount, Captain Roamer; but how provoking, for I did not send for the amount of my fine."

"That sum included it, sir, and I have the papers ready; but I am under bonds, sir, I may say, to do an unpleasant thing, but I was lenient with you."

"My orders are to at once put my prisoner in irons, and he is to so remain until it is decided what shall be done with him."

"I have decided, sir, in your case; but to ease my conscience and to obey orders, I must go through the form, though as unpleasant for me as for yourself, of slipping the irons upon your wrists."

"It will be between ourselves, Captain Vail, unless you wish to speak of the affair."

"By no means, sir," and Rupert Vail shuddered as he held out his hands.

Instantly the irons snapped, as they were closed upon his wrists with remarkable dexterity, and quick as a flash a pistol muzzle looked into his eyes and the stern words came:

"One cry aloud, sir, and you are a dead man."

"Sit there!"

White with terror and amazement the merchant captain could but obey, being wholly at the mercy of the man, who forced him into a heavy arm-chair with a strength that was wonderful.

Then, with quickness and skill he took from beneath his cloak a package, and a gag was forced into his mouth, and a rope bound him securely to the massive chair.

"Now, Captain Vail, I will see that this money is right—yes, fifteen thousand dollars, five of which is your fine to me, for I am the Government in your case, and ten thousand which takes up the little I O U, payable on demand, and which I leave here upon your desk."

"You see, my dear captain, I have kept my word, and presented your note *in person*, though I regret to have to leave you bound."

"Here is the key to the irons along with your I O U, so *au revoir*, Captain Vail, for we shall meet again," and with a light laugh the man removed a false beard and revealed the handsome, smiling face of Captain Meredith of the Red Dove.

Another instant and he had replaced it, his cloak was drawn close around him and he left the office so leisurely no one supposed his neck was in a noose.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE MAD SAILOR.

WHEN Captain Meredith so suspiciously disappeared from the cottage of Ethel Monte, at the time of Constable Cassidy's visit, he was in full possession of the facts, as they appeared against him, in the accusation of piracy.

He heard enough of what Constable Cassidy made known to Ethel, for him to suddenly decide to leave the cottage.

This he did, slipping out of the door quietly and leaving no word of parting for Ethel, who so fondly trusted in his honor and truth.

He left the yard around the cottage by a side gate and wended his steps rapidly along the shore for some little distance until he came to a clump of trees, and in their shadow was hidden a light skiff.

This, with a slight effort of his great strength, he raised and placed in the water, and taking the oars, pulled rapidly toward the open sea.

He had not gone very far before a vessel loomed up before him, lying close inshore and riding at a single anchor, with sail set.

He was hailed in a low tone from the deck, as he advanced, and promptly answered:

"Dove."

"Ay, ay, sir."

He was soon alongside, and as he reached the quarter-deck an officer advanced to meet him.

"Mr. Waller, get up the anchor and run out to sea as quietly as possible; but first send to my cabin that Mad Sailor."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the officer, and he called to a seaman and gave him an order, while his captain continued on into his cabin.

The seaman went forward and soon reappeared on deck with a man, whose irons clanked at every step he took.

As the two disappeared down the cabin companionway, the vessel swung clear of her anchor, and under a light breeze glided silently out to sea.

The seaman meanwhile led the man in irons into the cabin.

There sat the young captain, the cabin-lamp revealing his handsome, fearless face distinctly.

"Thank you, Verner; have you the keys of his irons?"

"Yes, sir; but for the Lord's sake, cap'n, don't set him free or he'll take the ship," cried the seaman in alarm.

"I have no fear of him, Verner, so give me the keys and you can go."

"Let me stay, cap'n, for that man are mad as a harpooned whale, and he'll kill you."

"No, he'll do me no harm, Verner, so do as I order you, though I thank you for your wish to serve me."

The words were spoken quietly, but the seaman knew that his captain was in earnest, so he took a couple of keys from his pocket and with a salute left the cabin.

The object of this conversation was a man past his half a century of years.

And yet he seemed to be prematurely gray, for his long hair and beard were snow white.

His face was pale, his eyes sunken, and fierce as a tiger's they glared at the young captain.

He was dressed in sailor garb and there were irons upon his wrists and ankles, and a chain connected the two.

"Be seated, my friend, for I wish to talk with you, and it will be pleasanter to chat over a glass of brandy and water and cigar; but first let me remove those irons, for you are no more mad than I am."

There was something in the low, musical voice, the commanding manner and utter fearlessness of the speaker that awed the madman, for he said in a low, earnest tone:

"God bless you, sir! you understand me."

"I do, indeed, and I intend to help you get the spider-webs out of your brain and be your friend."

As he spoke, Captain Meredith unlocked the irons, first from his ankles and then from his wrists.

He seemed not to be observing the madman, yet was watching him as a cat would a mouse.

"Now to get our refreshments," he said, and he stepped into the gangway, where there was a locker, and returned with a decanter of brandy, some glasses and cigars.

These he placed upon the table between himself and his guest, and lighting a cigar, handed one to the seaman.

Then he poured out some brandy for both of them, shoved a plate of sweet biscuit over to his companion and said:

"Now, captain, help yourself, and we will chat over old times."

"You call me captain—no one else does that," eagerly said the madman.

"Certainly, for you *were* a captain, you remember."

"I was a captain—so I told them, but curse them! they—"

"Your very good health, captain, and let me know how you like this brandy?"

The madman's rising fury was instantly checked, and Verner and the officer Waller, whom he had called to and told him he would stay near to aid his captain when the madman "broke loose," as he expressed it, saw and heard all that occurred, for neither believed there was aught that Malcolm Meredith did not care for them to listen to.

"Great Neptune's beard, Lieutenant Wal-

ler, but ther cap'n could tame a jungle tiger, sir."

"I believe you, Verner," remarked the astonished lieutenant, for the madman was the terror of the ship.

Calmed at once by the calm manner of Meredith, the madman raised his glass to his lips and said rationally:

"Your health, good sir, and this brandy is good."

"And the cigar?"

"A pure Cuban, sir, just such as I used to get on my cruises to Havana."

"You have voyaged there often then, captain?"

"Yes, sir, many times, when I was—"

"It's a pleasant run in the winter season, and I like it better than whaling."

"You have been on a whaling voyage, captain?"

"Several, sir, several."

"The last one was in your ship the—the—"

"Mother Bunch, sir, and a good one she was."

"I have no doubt of it; but who was her owner?"

"Vail, sir, Ezra Vail; but it's a firm now, sir, Ezra Vail & Company, for he has taken his son in partnership, and a likely lad is Rupert."

"He is, indeed, captain; but your last cruise for Vail & Co. was not so fortunate, was it?"

"My last cruise?" and the madman looked bewildered.

"Yes; but drink your brandy—your good health—I refer to your voyage in the *Dart*!"

"Great God! I told them all, the devils, that I commanded the brig *Dart*, and curses upon them, I—"

"My dear Captain Hudson, I—"

"*Hudson*! Did you call me *Hudson*?" and the question was asked in piteous tones.

"Certainly, my dear captain, I called you by your name, Hudson, John Hudson, late in command of the brig *Dart*, owned by—listen to me, Captain Hudson—owned by Ezra Vail & Co., and which sailed for the Mediterranean, but was lost on the coast of Africa, and—"

"God in Heaven, I thank Thee!"

"I have my brain, my reason, my mind!"

"See, sir, my reason has come back to me, has it not?" the man was upon his feet now, grasping the arm of Meredith in vise-like grip, and devouring his face with his eyes.

"It has, sir, you are a perfectly sane man, Captain Hudson."

"Yes, that's my name, is it not, sir?"

"Don't say no, or I will die, I will go back into the gloom of madness, oh don't say *no*!"

"Your name is John Hudson, my dear fellow, so be calm and we will talk it all over."

"And I commanded the American merchant brig *Dart*!"

"You did, and she was lost in a storm."

"Tell me about it, my dear Hudson, for I have always felt an interest in the loss of that vessel, as my dear friend Mark Monte was a mate on board."

"Mark Monte! yes, as noble a fellow as ever lived, and a more perfect seaman I never knew."

"We were caught in a fearful blow, the brig sprung a leak, the masts went over the side and we drove upon a reef, and then the end came, for all were lost, all except me."

"I was hurt, hit hard on my head, but I reached the shore almost dead."

"I lay utterly exhausted, but heard strange voices and ran along the shore and hid."

"I wandered in the blazing sun for days and was found by a boat's crew who landed for water."

"They were Algerians and carried me to Egypt, and there I roamed about a madman, until at last I got a vessel to take me home."

"It was wrecked by a storm, we took to our boats, and the hardships I endured took away my reason and I remember no more," and the man dropped his head into his hands and wept like a child.

Meredith did not speak for a long while, but waited until the man was calm and said in his quiet way:

"Let me supply the balance, my dear captain.

"I found your boat at sea and you alone was alive in it.

"We did all we could to restore you to health and reason, and though you regained your bodily strength, your mind still wandered and at times you raved, so we had to put you in irons.

"In your ravings I heard you speak of your having been a captain, commanding the brig Dart, and how you were wrecked.

"I have a friend, one you know, one whom you believed dead, and who believes that he is the sole survivor of the Dart.

"It is Mark Monte, and he was taken by Arabs, but escaped, reached home, destitute, to find his mother dying, and he is now in prison, put there by Vail & Co., who accuse him of wrecking their brig, murdering you and your crew, and robbing you of their money in your possession."

"It is false! false as Hades!" and the voice of the sailor rung through the ship.

"I knew it was false, but thank Heaven I have you to fling the lie into the teeth of their accusers," was the reply of Malcolm Meredith, and his eyes flashed with triumph as he muttered:

"My card will win this game."

CHAPTER LIV.

BEFORE HIS ACCUSERS.

THE day rolled round which was to open the trial of Mark Monte, the "Mysterious Mutineer," as people had begun to call him.

The excitement in the town had increased, for it had more fuel to add to the flames, as a gentleman calling at the office of Ezra Vail & Co., to see the junior member of the firm, had discovered that gentleman in irons, bound to his massive desk chair, and black in the face from a gag in the mouth.

He gave the alarm, and when Rupert Vail was released from his unpleasant situation, to speak of it mildly, he told in his rage the whole story, which afterward he regretted having done, wishing that he had simply said robbers had served him in that way.

Captain Skinner was sent for, and told where he had met the stranger, and how he had arrived, and he pointed to the little vessel far away.

Every available craft in port went in chase of the daring pirate, as all now knew him to be, and urged by the very generous reward which Ezra Vail offered for the captain of the Red Dove, dead or alive.

There was a swift craft sent in pursuit, but the little vessel held her own until she rounded Winter Island Point, when suddenly came into sight the famous Red Dove, and the two vessels lay side by side for a few minutes, while the pursuers, at sight of the dreaded pirate brig, put back.

But the Red Dove stood out to sea, leaving the little vessel adrift on the waters, and the pursuers ran down to her to discover that she was a fisherman's craft that had been pressed into service, her crew being put in irons in the hold, while Captain Meredith and a dozen of his own men, with a gun put on her from the Red Dove, had run up to Salem and daringly anchored as a Government cutter.

This other bold deed of the captain of the Red Dove, but added to his fame, and people began to say that if Mark Monte was not soon tried and hanged, his sister's pirate lover would run in some night, storm the jail and carry him off by force of arms.

But the day of trial arrived and no such attempt had been made.

The very morning of the day set, the strange, hump-backed lawyer, Eben Gull, Esquire, had arrived by special coach and put up at the Salem Inn, and he was called for by Lawyer Browne.

The court soon was crowded to suffocation, and yet not a sound was heard as the prisoner was brought in.

His irons were taken off when he was put in the dock, and his eyes ran calmly over the sea of faces until they rested upon his sister's, and he smiled pleasantly to her.

Then his gaze met that of Wanda the Witch and he nodded; but a look of anger and defiance flashed into his fine eyes as he saw his accusers, father and son.

Next he beheld his lawyers, and Eben Gull stepped over and spoke to him, while

every eye was turned upon the strange-looking, deformed attorney, distinguished in appearance in spite of his deformity.

It was noticed that the lawyer smiled pleasantly in speaking to the prisoner in a low tone, but Mark Monte's face showed no emotion whatever.

It was also noticed, that, crowded as was the court-room, no one sat nearer to Wanda the Witch than was necessary, and she smiled grimly as she observed this circumstance herself.

All being in readiness, court was opened, and the prisoner was arraigned at the bar for "mutiny, murder and robbery upon the high seas."

CHAPTER LV.

FACE TO FACE.

ATTORNEY BROWNE, the legal light of Salem, was a terror to evil-doers, and his having been engaged for the defense of the mutineer, was much in the prisoner's favor, many thought.

But the prosecutors, Vail & Co., had engaged also the best legal talent at home and from Boston.

As for the strange lawyer who was associated with Attorney Browne, no one knew aught about him.

He was an "unknown quantity" that might, or might not appear to advantage.

Ethel gazed at him with strongest interest, a kind of fascination in fact, and seemed to feel that her brother's life rested in his hands.

The prosecution made all of their case that they possibly could, and it looked very black for the prisoner.

He had appeared at G— just before the sailing of the brig Dart, and been kindly given a second mate's berth on the vessel.

The brig had been lost, wrecked on the African Coast, and here, two years after, a man who had gone away penniless, and professed to have been the slave of an Arab master, returned home, as he said at first, without a dollar.

But then he suddenly launched forth with money, bought back his house, furnished it handsomely, improved it in many ways, kept two servants, had money in bank of his own and to his sister's credit, and had remained idling at home for months.

The only way that the prisoner could have gotten this money was by wrecking the Dart, thus causing the death of his shipmates, for he was the sole survivor, and then robbing her lockers of the money which had been intrusted to the captain's care for purchases at Mediterranean ports.

Of course the jury was asked to bring in a verdict of guilty, and being proven guilty meant hanging.

The jury was not an intelligent one, of "Mark Monte's peers," for they had some hard characters in the box, and some who might be suspected of accepting gold for their verdict to please the giver of the gold.

But the lawyers of the prisoner, to the surprise of all, had not challenged a single juror.

When the defense was to be heard the unknown lawyer arose amid a breathless silence.

His voice was rich in tone, clear as a bell, and very insinuating.

His white hair was in his favor too, and his eyes were seen glittering behind his gold spectacles, while his white, even teeth looked dangerous as he uttered words of sarcasm.

His first words fairly startled the court and all, for he said:

"May it please your Honor, and gentlemen of the jury, the dead cannot appear as witnesses, so you have already agreed to hang the prisoner on the evidence of suspicious circumstances.

"There is one witness, however, whom I wish to call in good time, merely to give my client a character, to show that he is not the vile wretch your fancy has painted him.

"I desire to have the prisoner just tell his own story, and then I have a few words to say."

He turned to Mark Monte, who, with the permission of the court arose and told his story in a voice that all heard distinctly.

Then the unknown lawyer resumed:

"Now I could make charges too, but I won't.

"I could charge that this Arab, Selim, was a tool of Ezra Vail & Co, the rich whalers.

"I could charge that Ezra Vail used him for any work he thought might soil his dainty hands, and that the confession the Arab intended to make, when death's seal closed his lips forever, was, that he had been ordered to *get rid*, mind you, I only say *get rid* of the prisoner, for some reason in the way of this rich merchant.

"I say I *could* make these charges of infamy; but of course I do not."

Then the lawyer, holding spellbound the entire mass of humanity, silencing even the opposing attorneys with his eloquence, and causing Ezra Vail and his son to writhe under his sarcasm, went on in the same manner, telling what he *could* do, if he only would; but far be it from him to stain the escutcheon of a noble name and family—the Vails."

Suddenly dropping his cynical, vituperative manner, he cried in thunder tones:

"And now, your Honor, and gentlemen of this most august jury, I will fling in your face the false charges made by these most honorable and rich merchants against the prisoner, for I call upon *my witness* to appear.

"I call upon the dead to rise from the sea and confront them!

"*I call upon John Hudson, captain of the American brig Dart, to stand in that witness box and face the men who dare accuse Mark Monte of mutiny, murder and robbery upon the high seas.*

"Take your stand, John Hudson!"

A man arose in the crowd, drew a muffler from about his head and neck, and advanced to the witness-box.

"I am John Hudson; I commanded the brig Dart, and Mark Monte's story is true as he told it, except that I was not dragged back into the sea by the surf, for, as you see, I escaped death, thank God, and am here to save this court from the cruel crime of sending an innocent man to death."

In vain did the officers strive to preserve order, for the crowd would cheer, until the court ordered the benches cleared.

Then it was found that the unknown lawyer had also disappeared, and Ezra Vail and his son had slipped out in the confusion, glad to get away.

Cleared of the disgrace upon him, Mark Monte, accompanied by his sister, shedding tears of joy, and followed by Captain Hudson, who had promised to go with them home, went to the Salem Inn to find Eben Gull, Esquire.

But he had been gone an hour, driving away in his special carriage, Landlord Hastings told them.

So to Cliff Cottage they went, as Captain Hudson hinted that he could tell something about their unknown friend.

As Captain Hudson was a bachelor, Ethel at once said:

"We are going to adopt you, captain, as our father, Mark and I, so Cliff Cottage must be your home."

"God bless you, my child, I will be only too happy to have it so, when I am home from my voyages," was the response of the old sailor, whose reason was no longer clouded under the sorrows and sufferings he had known.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE BITTER END.

EZRA VAIL & Co. were too powerful as a firm, and too rich, too many people depending upon their vessels for bread, for men to assert openly that it had been a plot of theirs to destroy Mark Monte.

Many knew that Rupert had seemed anxious to marry Ethel, and her refusal of him they could not, or pretended not to believe was sufficient cause for revenge on the part of father and son.

They could see no other motive, so Ezra Vail & Co. did not suffer much in public esteem by the escape of Mark Monte.

They were the first to welcome back Captain Hudson, and to seek to atone, through him, for the injury they had done Mark.

But the old captain accepted their advances very coldly, refused another ship they offered him, and gave both of them a piece of advice unasked, to the effect:

"Steer clear of Mark Monte, gentlemen, if you wish to keep afloat, for he has his fight-

ing flag nailed to the mast and I don't blame him."

The captain readily got a vessel, and sailed a month after he returned to Salem, and upon the same day Mark Monte put to sea as captain of a fleet schooner belonging to a Salem firm in the West Indian trade.

But before Captain Hudson left Cliff Cottage, the last evening that he and Mark passed there with Ethel, he told them a secret, and one that wounded them deeply.

That secret was that he had been picked up at sea by a vessel which he had since discovered was none other than the Red Dove, and that the man whom he could not but love, for he had recalled his reason to him, was Captain Meredith the Mysterious Marauder.

He it was, who in the disguise of Eben Gull, Esquire, had gulled the lawyers, court and all, being no lawyer himself, only possessed of a wonderful eloquence and powers of oratory.

With his mustache shaved off, a wig of snow-white hair, a false hump, deacon-like clothes, gold spectacles and his face whitened with cosmetic, he had been suspected by no one of being other than he had represented himself, a "Sea Lawyer."

This secret Captain Hudson deemed it his duty to tell, as he had discovered it by accident, and because he knew Ethel to be infatuated with the gallant young sailor, and would, when convinced of the truth, never see him more.

And the old captain was right, for when, after her brother had gone to sea, one day she received a note from the young sailor, asking her to meet him at a certain place on the shore near the cottage, she sent by the messenger the following letter:

"I cannot do as you wish for all is at an end between us."

"Your own career must show you that I am right."

"From my heart I thank you, for you saved my life, and you saved my brother from the gallows, and more, there is a debt between us which some day will be paid, for I know now from whom came the miniature frame."

"I was true to the bitter end, when I discovered you false."

"Let this be the end forever between us—it must be, it shall be, for I will never again see you, or read a line you write me."

ETHEL MONTE.

And thus did Ethel Monte cut out of her heart her first and only love, content to dwell in her little home and bring joy to her brother's life, and soothe the last years of the white-haired old sailor who had risen as from a grave in the sea and saved Mark Monte from a bitter, cruel fate.

CHAPTER LVII.

EZRA VAIL'S SECRET.

EZRA VAIL and his son sat alone in the library of their elegant home, the evening following the escape of Mark Monte from their cruel power.

The faces of both were pale, for they had been dealt a hard blow by the return of John Hudson.

"In Satan's name who is that old lawyer?" asked Rupert suddenly, as he poured out a glass of brandy and dashed it off at a swallow.

The old man took a glass also before he answered:

"I'd give a cool thousand to know; but did you ever hear such a speech?"

"Never, and I never wish to again."

"We must look him up to engage him on any cases we may have."

"You are right; but what will you do now, my son?"

"About the girl?"

"Yes."

"Give her up."

"Yes."

"You said you would tell me the secret of your urgent reason for my marrying her, either when she became my wife, or we changed our views."

"Yes; do you wish to know now?"

"I do."

"Well, we can have our little revenge, my son."

"How so, father?"

"In the secret being known to us, and in keeping Mark Monte and his sister out of a fortune to which ours in comparison, is nothing."

"The deuce you say!"

"Yes, you have heard of old Miser Peter Rutledge, of G——?"

"Yes, the old man who was murdered when I was a lad?"

"The same."

"What of him?"

"Well, I used to love his wife; beautiful Lola La Salle she was then; but, she refused me."

"Ah!"

"So I married your mother."

"I see."

"And she, Lola La Salle, sold herself to the old miser. He led her a dog's life, until one night, driven to despair, she drove a knife to his heart."

"I rejoice that she was not my mother."

"So do I, now; but I loved her then. But, my son, she left two children."

"Yes, I remember; she was hanged for the murder."

"She was, and his will left her all of his vast property."

"She sent her children off, secretly, but left them all her riches, when she was hanged, and it is now a vast fortune. It was to be divided when the girl became twenty-one. The children were adopted by her sister as her own, and so raised, and they know no better to-day, for Captain Roland Monte died and never told, and so did his wife, though I have heard she often said she had a secret to tell."

"The property is in good hands, but the trustees even do not know about the children, and to keep them out of this fortune shall be our revenge, my son."

"Yes, father, it shall be so; but, how strange that Ethel should be the daughter of a murderer!"

"Very strange," was the quiet response of Ezra Vail, who had, at last, told the secret which he had long kept locked in his heart, and which he had discovered by accident.

CONCLUSION.

Wanda the Witch claims a passing word, for she proved herself true as steel to those she loved, and though the Salemites continued to fear the strange woman, she was ever welcome to the home of Mark and Ethel Monte.

As for Captain Meredith, the letter which Ethel had sent him, saying that it "must be the bitter end," seemed to have clouded his life the more, for rumors were constantly afloat to show that the Mysterious Marauder, the Scourge of the Sea Wings of Salem, still flew his outlaw flag over the decks of his matchless vessel Red Dove, the foe of the whalers.

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